

Rumors of Suu Kyi's release prove unfounded

Mizzima - Friday, 31 October 2008 19:27

by Myint Maung

New Delhi - At least 30 youth members from Burma's primary opposition party – National League for Democracy – on Friday arrived at the party's head office in hope of hearing the news that detained party leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would be released.

The youth came to the party's head office in West Shwegondine of Bahan Township in Rangoon, after hearing a rumor suggesting that the detained Burmese democracy icon would be released.

A party youth member, and in-charge of the South Dagon Township NLD, who was among the thirty youth that went to the office on Friday, said, "We all went to the party office to inquire about the release of Suu Kyi, but a party official said it was only a rumor."

Nyan Win, the NLD's spokesperson, said, "We have not heard anything about it. A number of our members have inquired about it," declining to further comment on the issue.

The rumors came only days after authorities removed barbwire barricades on University Avenue from blocking access to Aung San Suu Kyi's lakeside villa.

The rumor, whose origins are untraceable, began spreading like wildfire on Monday, the day after the barricades were removed.

"We heard about the rumor since Monday, though we don't know the source. And we heard that she [Aung San Suu Kyi] will be released on Friday, so youth members went to the office to check it out," the youth in-charge of South Dagon Township said.

The Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate has spent 13 of the past 19 years in solitary confinement. She was last arrested in May 2003, after her motorcade was attacked by a junta-backed mob in the town of Depayin while she was on a political tour of upper Burma.

In recent months, party members and her personal lawyer have complained that her period of detention exceeds more than what Burmese law permits without trial – a maximum of five years. But the junta said the law allows up to six years, and extended her detention period when the original five year term expired in May.

Her lawyer, Kyi Win, on her behalf, has submitted a petition to the government requesting for a review of her detention period.

But Nyan Win said there has so far been no reply from the government regarding the petition.

UN Wants India To Assist Myanmar Reform

Bernama - Oct 31 2008

By P. Vijian - NEW DELHI -- The United Nations (UN) wants India to continue helping military-ruled Myanmar to achieve its political democratisation process to enable the situation to return to normalcy.

"India, as a neighbour, could help fasten the political process and encourage the democratisation process. India has been constructive in helping Myanmar and its commitment is encouraging," UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon told the media in Delhi Friday after meeting top Indian leaders.

India and Myanmar have close military relations and the minerals resource-rich Southeast Asian nation is of strategic interest to the booming Indian economy.

Being its neighbour, India has always maintained cordial relationship with the ruling junta despite isolation by the international community, mainly by western and American powers, for failing to introduce political reforms and release political prisoner Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The leaders of Myanmar should look at the future of the people and the county. They should accelerate democratisation and release Aung San Suu Kyi and the political prisoners," said Ban, who is on his first two-day official visit to India as UN secretary-general.

Touching on India-Pakistan relationship, he said both nuclear-armed arch rivals should continue their peace talks to improve political ties.

"India and Pakistan should continue with the composite dialogue. I think both leaders are committed to the dialogue.

"But I am disturbed by the deterioration of security in Pakistan because of extremists, bombings and terrorist attacks.

"The international community must help Pakistan. Pakistan is an important country in the region," he added.

Water Shortage Threatens Thousands in Delta

Irrawaddy - Friday, October 31, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING

A water crisis is threatening the livelihoods of thousands of cyclone survivors in Burma's Irrawaddy delta, the international aid agency Save the Children warned on Thursday.

Shazia Khan, a spokesperson for Save the Children, said that the lack of safe drinking water is a major concern because many wells and drinking pools in the region are still contaminated nearly six months after Cyclone Nargis struck on May 2-3.

As the end of the monsoon season approaches, it will become more difficult for people in the region to survive by collecting rainwater, she added.

"With the beginning of the dry season, the problem is that a lot of wells and drinking pools are still contaminated. So we are really worried about people not having enough water in the next few months," she said.

Children are expected to be especially affected by the water shortage, as they are highly vulnerable to diseases associated with poor sanitary conditions.

"The lack of clean water will directly impact the health of children," said Andrew Kirkwood, the country director for Save the Children in Burma.

Save the Children estimates that around 40 percent of the 140,000 people who were killed or went missing after the cyclone were children. Many who survived were orphaned or separated from their parents.

The slow pace of the recovery in the delta is also having dire consequences for the economic prospects of survivors.

"One of our major concerns is that we want to make sure that families get back on their feet," said Khan, who added that Save the Children was not just providing families with short-term assistance, but also with the means to help them rebuild their livelihoods.

"A lot of families lost everything. They lost their fishing boats and their land, any means of earning a living," she said.

According to Save the Children, the cyclone flooded about 600,000 hectares of agricultural land, killed up to 50 percent of livestock in the delta, and destroyed fishing boats, food stocks and agricultural implements.

"It is expensive to rebuild one's life, and even more so for the poor," said Kirkwood.

"Any new financial obligations could force people to make difficult choices in regard to the food they buy or whether they can send their children to school."

Save the Children is currently trying to complete a range of measures to increase access to safe water and develop the ability of families to manage over the upcoming months and supervise the health of children.

The charity is working in 14 of the 15 worst-affected townships in Burma and has reached about 500,000 people with lifesaving food and water, shelter materials and household and hygiene items.

China's footprint in Myanmar expands

Asia Times – 1 November

By Brian McCartan

CHIANG MAI - Once under the radar in mostly remote areas, China's growing investments in resource-rich Myanmar have become more openly apparent as Beijing parlay its close diplomatic ties to the country's ruling military junta into lucrative contracts and concessions. China's commercial advance comes while the United States and Europe impose strict trade and investment sanctions against the military regime.

Recent investigative reports, including from environmental groups EarthRights International and Arakan Oil Watch, detail the involvement of some 69 Chinese multinational corporations in at least 90 hydropower, mining and oil and gas projects across the country. The growing commitments are a testament to China's pragmatic approach to commercial diplomacy and underscore its interest in maintaining Myanmar's political status quo.

China's Myanmar investments focus mainly on energy and natural resources, which are required in ever-larger quantities to fuel its fast-expanding industrialization and urbanization. Chinese projects range from hydropower dams to the highly ambitious and controversial Shwe Gas pipeline that is projected to cross the length of Myanmar to transport fuel to China's landlocked southern Yunnan province.

That particular project is designed to open access for China to the Indian Ocean for some fuel shipments and circumvent the congested Strait of Malacca, through which over 70% of its current oil and gas imports travel. Beijing has expressed strategic concerns that in a conflict the United States could block the strait and starve the Chinese economy of fuel imports.

India and Thailand also aggressively jockey for access to the resources of neighbor Myanmar, in contrast to US and Europe, which subject the country to strict trade and investment sanctions in protest against its rulers' abysmal rights record. Those curbs were recently augmented by so-called "smart sanctions" aimed at hitting the private resources of senior junta members and their top business associates.

The growing scale of China's commitments have the potential to provide huge profits for the regime, funds which historically have been employed to buy weaponry that is used to suppress the democratic and ethnic opposition. Some economic analysts estimate the regime has in recent years earned US\$3.5 billion in natural gas sales alone.

China's investment in Myanmar's oil and gas reserves is on the rise. EarthRights International identified 21 Chinese-funded onshore and offshore oil and natural gas projects, including the Shwe Gas project in Arakan state and newer blocks in Sagaing division. China is also reportedly interested in using Kyaukpyu Island off Arakan state as a transshipment point for Middle Eastern oil and gas imports, which will then be piped up through Myanmar to China's Yunnan province.

A \$1 billion contract has been signed between the Myanmar government and China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation, or Sinopec, to build a first oil pipeline. A parallel gas pipeline is expected to follow. A memorandum of understanding has also been signed between China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) for an assessment on the construction of a crude oil terminal.

Chinese partners are also involved in the gigantic 7,100-megawatt Tasang Dam on the Salween river in Shan state, while other dams on the N'Mai Hka, Mali Hka and Irrawaddy rivers in Kachin state are being built to provide electricity to Yunnan. According to EarthRights International, the Kachin state dams are expected to have a combined capacity of 13,360 megawatts.

Sidestepping sanctions

Chinese companies have also long taken part in small-scale mining operations in Myanmar, often in quest of gold and jade. According to EarthRights International, China is now involved in at least six major

mining operations in the country, including China Nonferrous Metal Mining Company's recent \$600 million investment in the Taguang Taung nickel deposit.

While the US recently imposed sanctions on the import of precious stones from Myanmar, Chinese merchants have helped to fill the trade gap. A government-sponsored gem fair in Yangon in October netted the regime an estimated \$175 million. Chinese traders, who were mostly interested in Myanmar jade, represented the largest contingent at the event, with 2,200 out of the 2,648 attendees.

China's commercial embrace of Myanmar is underwritten by a long-standing policy of non-interference between the two neighboring countries. First signed in 1954 and known formally as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the policy nominally separates business from politics. It has allowed China to invest heavily in Myanmar's underdeveloped resources while resisting US, European and United Nations calls to leverage its influence to push for political change.

Political change in Myanmar could erode Beijing's present privileged position there. Certainly China has used its veto power in the UN Security Council to block criticism and sanctions against Myanmar.

In the past year, Chinese statements on Myanmar have taken a slightly critical edge, indicating to some either that Chinese patience with Myanmar's generals is waning, or a concern that stability be maintained to protect Beijing's economic and strategic interests. After the junta's violent crackdown on demonstrators last year resulted in widespread international condemnation, Chinese diplomat Tang Jiaxuan was reported to have told Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win in September 2007, "China wholeheartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country." That veiled criticism went further the following month, when China joined with Russia and India in a call for the Myanmar's ruling generals to meet with the opposition.

A UN Security Council resolution in October last year condemning the Myanmar government for its use of violence against protestors and demanding the release of political prisoners was supported by the Chinese government. Yet China is clearly most concerned about a possible international intervention or sudden regime change in Myanmar that nullifies its commercial concessions and privileges.

Earlier this year, Beijing expressed strong opposition to the idea that US, France and Great Britain should use military means to force Myanmar's generals to accept foreign aid after the Cyclone Nargis disaster displaced as many as two million people in the country. At the height of the standoff, the US and France had warships near the coastal region worst hit by the storm, while Western diplomats pushed to invoke a UN "right to protect" provision to help the stranded victims.

China has instead advocated Myanmar change from within, in line with the ruling junta's stated plans to move towards a managed form of electoral democracy by 2010. At the same time, the democratic opposition has made few attempts to convince China that should they take power, Chinese strategic interests and investments would be preserved and guaranteed.

At least outwardly, there appears at present to be no contact between the opposition and the Chinese government. China's ability to provide low-cost machinery, technical know-how and long-term, low-interest loans would presumably make it an attractive strategic partner regardless of who holds power in Myanmar.

But from Beijing's point of view, its growing and more visible commercial interests are for now better served by the devil it knows.

Brian McCartan is a Chiang Mai-based freelance journalist.

[Insurgent groups in N-E getting help from China?](#)

The Times of India - 31 Oct 2008

NEW DELHI: There may not be a Chinese footprint in Thursday's Assam blasts, but intelligence sources say the Chinese have been active in the region now for some time.

Over the past couple of years, the Chinese have been keeping up the pressure on India in indirect ways — the traditionally active arms supply channel which supplies weapons and explosives to the north-eastern insurgent groups. The trade routes in the region are fluid, particularly where the Myanmar and

China borders meet. In recent months, intelligence sources say the Chinese have managed to increase the flow of funds into these groups.

Diplomatically, India has raised the issue with the Chinese during almost every major conversation, but this has been strenuously denied by the Chinese government, which says that they do not interfere in India's internal affairs. But one of the reasons why the Indian security agencies have raised suspicions is that there are no markings on the weapons which have been picked up by them from the north-east. But a more careful study shows the weapons to be Chinese made, sources said.

What is more worrying to the Indian agencies is that these arms supplies may not be directly sourced. In recent times, the NSCN (K) has come under the scanner for its newly established links with the Chinese. Anthony Shimray of NSCN (K) has been spotted visiting Yunnan province of China and meeting some Chinese intelligence officials.

The concern is that Ulfa and other north-east insurgent groups could be working in tandem with groups like the NSCN. This gives the Chinese plausible deniability because there is no direct route, but arms and explosives could be coming through some of these groups, not directly connected.

This route is beginning to acquire the status of a major arms supply route in that part of the country, which has implications for Myanmar, even Sri Lanka, said sources.

Some of the newer reports indicate that the Chinese intelligence collaborates with the Myanmar army to smuggle arms into India through the tri-border. With the Kachin independent army in control of northern Myanmar, they too have been noticed selling arms to various insurgent groups. Security sources said, arms also come in from China's Yunnan province into Ruili in Myanmar and then transported by trucks up towards the Indian border. These weapons too carry no country markings though the intelligence groups are almost certain that they emanate from the Chinese.

Recently, Jane's Intelligence Review reported that China had replaced Cambodia and Thailand as the main supplier of weapons to insurgent groups in India's north-east, Myanmar and Sri Lanka and also to the Taliban. The report went on to say that the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a rebel group in Myanmar, acts as the "middleman" between Chinese arms manufacturers and insurgent groups in the north-east, with most weapons routed through China's Yunnan province. From here, it takes the land route to Myanmar and from there, it is moved to the Indian border at Tamu, opposite Manipur.

Burma/Myanmar Day: civil society and future prospects

European Commission press release - IP/08/1596 - 29/10/2008

On 29 October, the European Commission co-hosts the one-day conference "Burma/Myanmar – prospects for the future" in Brussels. European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner has taken the initiative to invite NGOs, advocacy groups, international organisations and think tanks from Burma/Myanmar and from Europe to discuss the present situation in the country and its future outlook. Furthermore, it will take a closer look at the role of civil society.

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner said: "Burma/ Myanmar should remain in the centre of our attention as a country that is in dire need of democratic reforms, release of political prisoners and good governance. In addition the people of Burma/Myanmar are still suffering from the devastating consequences of cyclone Nargis. Citizens from all walks of life have shown the most commendable solidarity with victims of the disaster. They deserve our full attention and assistance. Moreover, the EU, ASEAN and the UN have taken an active role in fostering a dialogue on political reforms in Burma/Myanmar. Some positive political signals can be perceived, such as the continuation of the political process, the "Road Map". However, much more still needs to be achieved"

The conference programme foresees a session on civil society responses in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis in May, and another session on civil society in the political process, in particular its role, its space and possibilities for support.

The conference is jointly hosted and organised by the European Commission and the NGOs ICCO (*Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation*) , BCN (*Burma Centrum Nederlands*), TNI

(Transnational Institute) and the Euro-Burma Office, sharing the goal of a better future for the country and its people.

For more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/myanmar/intro/index.htm

Claims Burma is missing out on crucial aid due to politics

ABC - October 29, 2008 18:02:06

Aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres says it is concerned international governments have placed a boycott on humanitarian aid to Burma because of their disapproval of the military government.

It says while there has been an influx of foreign aid workers to the region since the cyclone in May, more needs to be done to address health problems such as malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and malnutrition.

Doctor Frank Smithuis from Medecins Sans Frontieres Holland, based in Burma, has told the Connect Asia Program the nation receives the lowest amount of international aid in the world.

"I don't know who to blame, but I think the world has not paid enough attention to Myanmar and I think the main reason is the political reason," he said.

"It is basically a humanitarian boycott and that is not fair to the Myanmar people."

Doctor Smithuis says there are about 30 international aid agencies working in Burma but the number of aid workers is not enough for a country with a population of 55 million people.

He says Laos and Cambodia have far better access to international aid.

You can find the full story at the Connect Asia website: <http://radioaustralia.net.au/connectasia>

Burma jails pro-democracy activists

The Australian - October 30, 2008

From correspondents in Rangoon

A BURMA court has sentenced nine pro-democracy activists – already being held in detention – to six months in jail for disrupting their trial on other charges, a lawyer said.

Aung Thein, a lawyer working for the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, said it was the first time the nine, including well-known activists Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, had faced a judge since their arrests in August last year for leading a march against a hike in fuel prices.

"Altogether nine people, including Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, were sentenced yesterday by a divisional court for disturbing the court procedure," Aung Thein told AFP.

"It was the first time they'd faced the court on the charges against them."

It is unclear whether the six-month sentences will extend their overall jail time or be counted as part of their detention to date. Aung Thein gave no further details of the disturbance in court that led to the sentencing as he is not representing the activists.

According to legal sources, the students, detained in Rangoon's notorious Insein prison, are now defending themselves and for the past fortnight family members have been barred from attending their trials.

The nine were arrested in their homes in August 2007 after leading a rally against steep rises in fuel prices that preceded a larger monk-led uprising.

They are still awaiting sentence on various other unknown charges against them.

All nine detainees are former student leaders who have already served lengthy prison sentences over earlier protests against Myanmar's regime. Since their release from prison over the past three years, the

former student leaders have breathed new life into the pro-democracy movement, which had been rudderless since the latest arrest of the NLD's leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Aung San Suu Kyi helped lead the NLD to a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the military has never recognised the results.

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

Burma, China Consolidating Military Relations

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 29, 2008

By MIN LWIN - Signs are evident that Burma and China are stepping up military cooperation after Burma's top three generals met with Gen Zhang Li, the vice chief-of-staff of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), on Monday in Naypyidaw.

Snr-Gen Than Shwe, who frequently snubs visiting UN envoys, reportedly offered a warm welcome to the visiting Chinese delegation. Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye and Gen Thura Shwe Mann also attended the meeting. Thura Shwe Mann later held separate talks with the Chinese general, according to China's state-run *Xinhua News Agency* on Monday.

Xinhua did not provide details of the meeting, but said that Zhang Li had discussions with Thura Shwe Mann, the chief of general staff of the Burmese army, navy and air force. The Chinese news agency also commented on the spirit of "friendly cooperation" between the armed forces of the two countries.

Htay Aung, a Burmese researcher in Thailand, said that Gen Zhang Li's trip to Burma was a means of strengthening cooperation between the two armed forces.

China has been the major supplier of military hardware to Burma since the regime crushed a pro-democracy uprising in 1988. China has provided fighter jet planes, naval ships, tanks, military vehicles and ammunition to the Burmese junta. It has been reported that China has delivered some US \$2 billion worth of military equipment to Burma since the early 1990s.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy*, Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese analyst living at the China-Burma border, said he believed that the generals' meeting focused on the military industry.

"The Chinese armed forces have helped and supported the Burmese with heavy military hardware for years," he said, adding that 90 percent of Burmese military transportation is supplied by China.

New York-based Human Rights Watch pointed out in its October 2007 report that India, China, Russia, and other nations have supplied Burma with weapons that the Burmese army uses to commit human rights abuses against civilians and to bolster its ability to maintain power.

The international rights group said that China has supplied Burma with advanced helicopter gunships, arms production technology, support equipment and small arms, including mortars, landmines, and assault rifles, as well as assistance in setting up an indigenous small-arms production capability. It said China had also supplied a vast array of advanced military hardware to Burma, including fighter planes, naval vessels and tanks, and other infantry support weapons.

In August, Burma's Chief of Defense Industry Lt-Gen Tin Aye visited China. State-run *Xinhua* reported that he met with Gen Liang Guanglie, a member of the central military commission and chief of general staff of the PLA, in an effort to increase cooperation in political, economic, cultural and military spheres.

According to *Xinhua*, the Chinese defense ministry was ready to work with Burma to further expand bilateral cooperation, so as to help the two nations' defense and to safeguard regional peace and stability.

According to a report leaked to *The Irrawaddy*, in July, at a confidential meeting with senior staffers, Home Affairs minister Maj-Gen Maung Oo said that Burma was not pro-China. However, Maung Oo stated that Burma was China's "road to the sea of southern states" because allies of the US, such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were encircling China.

In 1989, Than Shwe, then deputy commander in chief of the armed forces, led the first high-level visit to China to purchase military hardware.

Relief as Cyclone Bypasses Burma

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 29, 2008

People living in Burma's Irrawaddy delta spent a tense weekend last week, as Cyclone Rashmi brought heavy rains and strong winds to a region that is still recovering from the effects of Cyclone Nargis, which killed at least 85,000 people less than six months ago.

According to the Bangladesh government's Comprehensive Disaster Management Program, the cyclone made landfall in Bangladesh early Monday morning with wind speeds of up to 80 km/hour. The cyclone, which formed over the Indian Ocean, left at least two people dead and another 11 missing.

Observers said that the loss of life and property was minimal, thanks to the successful preparedness efforts of the Bangladeshi authorities and local communities.

The Burmese government, which was heavily criticized for its failure to alert people to the threat of Cyclone Nargis before it struck on the night of May 2-3, also issued public warnings over the weekend through its department of meteorology and hydrology.

But government efforts to make a show of readiness did little to reassure local people, who feared the worst.

"We were terrified," said one delta resident, describing his reaction to the powerful gales and menacing clouds that swept the region. "We couldn't take our eyes off of the sky."

This brush with a repeat of the disaster that left an estimated 140,000 people dead or missing in May came as Burma's deputy foreign minister, Kyaw Thu, was in Bangkok to attend a United Nations-backed meeting on the country's efforts to recover from the effects of Cyclone Nargis.

The two-day "Regional High-level Expert Group Meeting on Post-Nargis Recovery and Livelihood Opportunities," organized by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), was convened on Monday to bring together disaster-response experts from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries in the region.

"Asia has always been a focal hub for world knowledge," said Kyaw Thu, who is also the chairman of the Tripartite Core Group (TCG), which coordinates the relief effort in the Irrawaddy delta. The group consists of representatives of the UN, Asean and the Burmese government.

Kyaw Thu added that he was "engrossed by [the participants'] rich experience and compelling expertise, especially in managing and dealing with the recent natural disasters that have happened in our region."

Observers say that Cyclone Nargis had a significant impact on the thinking of some Burmese government officials, who now realize that there is a need for collaboration with international relief experts to support a sustainable recovery in the cyclone-hit areas.

"We have again found ourselves at a crucial crossroads," said Kyaw Thu, who is the son of Dr Maung Maung, a respected scholar who served as Burma's president for a month during the uprising of August-September 1988.

Total to keep up investment despite credit crisis

AP - Wednesday, October 29, 2008

LONDON: Total SA chief executive Christophe de Margerie said Wednesday the French oil company will continue to invest in oil projects over the medium to long term despite the global financial crisis.

De Margerie said that continued investment is necessary to prevent a spike in oil prices when economic growth and oil demand recovers down the track.

"We will continue to invest for the medium to long-term," he said at an annual Oil and Money conference in London, without specifying the time period any further.

Fears of a sustained economic downturn have driven the price of oil down from a record \$147.27 a barrel on July 11 to just over \$64 a barrel on Wednesday.

De Margerie noted that a prolonged economic crisis would hamper investment in new projects, potentially leading to a shortage of supply when demand resumes.

"The longer the crisis lasts, the higher the (oil) price will be" afterwards, he said.

De Margerie was also unapologetic for Total's investment in Myanmar, the south-east Asian country where the military junta has violently suppressed pro-democracy protests after refusing to recognize the results of a 1990 election that gave a landslide victory to the party led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Despite condemnation of the ruling military regime by Western nations, foreign companies are competing to grab a piece of Myanmar's vast reserves of oil and natural gas.

Foreign investment in Myanmar's oil and gas sectors more than tripled last year to \$474.3 million, according to a government report released in June.

Total, France's biggest company by market capitalization and revenue, has argued that any forced withdrawal would simply clear the way for another company to step into its place.

NEWS ANALYSIS: [Burma, N. Korea Follow Different Foreign Policy Paths](#)

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 29, 2008

By WAI MOE

Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win met his North Korean counterpart, Pak Ui Chun, in Pyongyang on Monday—a diplomatic event that disguised the different foreign policy directions taken recently by the two countries.

Nyan Win's visit to the North Korean capital is the second by a Burmese junta official within the past month. It follows a visit by Burma's Minister of Sports, Brig-Gen Thura Aye Myint.

Diplomatic sources say that although the two countries have developed close military ties since the 1990s, Nyan Win's visit is more likely to have been a diplomatic one, following the 2008 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit in Beijing.

Other high ranking military officials to visit North Korea this year include the mayor of Rangoon, Brig-Gen Aung Thein Lin (he visited in September), Lt-Gen Tin Aye, chief of the armed forces Office of Defense Industries (August) and Lt-Gen Myint Hlaing, chief of the *Tatmadaw's* air defense (July).

Burma and North Korea resumed diplomatic relations in April 2007 after the Burmese government cut ties in 1983 when North Korean agents attempted to assassinate the South Korean president and his delegation in Rangoon.

Despite the break in diplomatic ties, military cooperation between the two countries intensified in the 1990s.

"In late 1990, North Korea sold Burma 20 million rounds of 7.62 mm rifle ammunition," said Andrew Selth, an expert on Burma's military, in a research paper.

Security analysts say that the Burmese junta also sought strategic weapons such as submarines and ballistic missiles from North Korea. Pyongyang reportedly delivered nuclear technology to Burma and helped with strategic tunnel building technology in the construction of Naypyidaw. Some reports suggested North Korean technicians are in Burma.

The increasing cooperation between Burma and North Korea drew expressions of concern from the US. In testimony before the US House International Relations Committee in March 2004, Deputy Assistant

Secretary of State Matthew P. Daley said: "Of particular concern, we also have reason to believe that the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] has offered surface-to-surface missiles [to Burma]."

In April this year, Japan's NHK news agency reported that North Korea had sold multiple rocket launchers to the Burmese junta.

However, in his research paper, *Burma and Nuclear Proliferation: Policies and Perceptions*, Andrew Selth offered the reassurance: "It is highly unlikely that Burma currently has any intention of acquiring nuclear weapons, from North Korea and anywhere else."

Recently, the two countries have followed different foreign policy courses, and this month North Korea scored a success when the US removed it from Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism. The ruling, announced on October 11, followed Pyongyang's agreement to resume dismantling its nuclear program and to allow international inspectors to monitor this work.

North Korea had shared the Washington blacklist with Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria. It also found itself described by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2005 as an "outpost of tyranny," along with Burma, Belarus, Cuba, Iran and Zimbabwe.

While North Korea has been winning points recently with Washington, Burma continues to be castigated by the US for its failure to institute political reform and release its political prisoners.

The foreign policy focus of the US and the European Union differs between North Korea and Burma. Democracy and human rights issues are paramount in US and EU policy on Burma, North Korea's nuclear ambitions dictate their approach to North Korea.

Both Burma and North Korea concentrate their foreign policies on guaranteeing the survival of their respective regimes. While the North Korea regime has won legitimacy by playing the nuclear weapons card, the Burmese junta has been emphasizing the seven-step roadmap towards its version of democracy.

The language employed by each side is similar, however.

North Korea's military said in a statement on Tuesday: "The puppet authorities had better bear in mind that the advanced pre-emptive strike of our own style will reduce everything...It will turn out to be a just war— to build an independent reunified state on it."

The tone of the North Korean statement is similar to the slogans employed by the Burmese regime—such as "Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the State."

[What's the NLD Strategy for 2010 Election?](#)

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 29, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING

Activists and dissidents inside and outside Burma know the military regime is committed to retain power. The question is: What's next for the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD)?

Khin Htun, a former NLD member in Rangoon and one of the youth members who resigned from the main opposition party this month, said the Burmese people are waiting to be informed on what the NLD plans to do in the 2010 general election.

More than 100 NLD youth members resigned in mass on October 16 in Rangoon, complaining that they weren't allowed to participate in decision-making.

Khin Htun said the NLD leadership should be conducting a dialogue with ethnic leaders and members of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) to brainstorm strategy to approach the 2010 election.

Some NLD critics believe the group's leaders are waiting to hear from Aung San Suu Kyi, the titular head of the party who has been under house arrest since 2003.

One ethnic Chin leader, Htaung Kho Thang, a member of the CRPP and the United Nationalities League for Democracy, said he believed the current NLD leaders are not interested in a dialogue with ethnic leaders. Ethnic leaders are ready to talk if approached, he said.

Meanwhile, Thakin Chan Htun, a veteran Burmese politician in Rangoon, called for a free and fair general election in 2010, while saying that Suu Kyi must be allowed to participate.

In addition, he called for the release of all political prisoners. He said all citizens should be allowed to vote in the multi-party election and the international community—including UN representatives, foreign observers and journalists—should be allowed to freely report on the election, he said.

If the 2010 election is held, and is free and fair, then the NLD should consider how it wants to take part in the election, he said.

Nyo Ohn Myint, a leading Burmese dissident in exile, said he was opposed to the NLD fielding candidates in the election because it would be seen as legitimizing the constitution and the election process.

NLD leaders have repeatedly issued statements calling the constitution process unfair, but cited their willingness to negotiate with the regime if it accepts a constitutional review process.

The NLD spokesperson, Nyan Win, said, "If we have a chance to talk with the regime, we will hold bilateral negotiations and go on based on the agreement. Our idea is for 'democratic reform.' We willingly want to negotiate with them."

The chairman of the Arakan League for Democracy and secretary of the Committee Representing People's Parliament, Aye Thar Aung, said he remained hopeful the NLD could establish a credible strategy for the election.

Asked about the NLD strategy, Nyan Win said the NLD will keep its plan secret for now. Meanwhile, the military regime has already conducted campaign trips to various cities to rally support from citizens and ethnic ceasefire groups.

Several ethnic cease-fire groups are expected to create proxy political parties and field candidates in the election.

[Commentary: Where are Burma's women?](#)

DVB - Oct 28, 2008

Yaysin - If the Burmese government is to live up to its international responsibilities on women's rights, it must allow women to participate fully in the political life of the country.

The State Peace and Development Council signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1997. In September 2007, they submitted their latest report to the committee.

In the SPDC's report, they have tried to show that they provide equal opportunities to men and women without any discrimination, as required by article 7 of the convention on equality in political and public life.

The laws look good on paper – under the constitution, special protection is given to mothers, children and pregnant women and women are granted equal opportunities and rights. But it is a different matter in practice.

In its report to the CEDAW committee, the SPDC highlights section 154, subsection (a) of the constitution as providing that women are entitled to benefit from political, economic, social and cultural rights equally.

The regime also notes that section 6 of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law "provides that anyone is entitled to vote at the election irrespective of sex and religion", while section 8 of the same law grants the right to be elected irrespective of sex and religion.

These laws, the regime argues, are evidence of equality between men and women as set out in the constitution. But section 154, subsection (a) is from the 1974 constitution. Until this year, the regime had ruled Burma since 1990 without any valid constitution.

The Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law was enacted in 1989, the year before the 1990 election. The SPDC still points to this law as evidence of equality even though they refused to accept the result of the election held according to this law. The election laws are meaningless unless the regime respects the desires expressed by the voters.

There were only 67 women among the 1013 representatives that participated in the SPDC's national convention and no female representatives from the political parties attended the national convention in 2006. Is this evidence that women have equal opportunities and rights with men?

While women are highly active in politics and decision making around the world, the Burmese regime proudly states that Burmese women have equal rights and opportunities without having any women in positions of power.

Inside Burma, it is very rare to see women at the decision making level in politics. Why? Is it because women are not capable of taking up these positions?

We can see many women working in areas of social services, as teachers or in nursing, because of the expectation in Burmese culture that women should be responsible for taking care of the family and raising children, and must be gentle and kind – not skills that are valued in politics.

There are some women's organisations inside Burma, such as the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation. While it is nominally a non-governmental organisation, in reality it has little independence from the government.

When general Khin Nyunt was in power, his wife was the head of the organisation; when he was dismissed from his position, the head of the women's organisation was also changed.

What kind of activities have the women's organisations in Burma mostly done so far? Beauty pageants! Is this really important for women? They have also carried out some good activities, but these are very few in number compared with the beauty pageants.

Most of the time, the women's organisations which are dominated by the generals' wives activities are not helpful for women from rural areas.

When my mother was inside Burma, MWAF was trying to recruit all over the country. But the problem is that women who apply to join MWAF have to fill in the application form and donate 300 kyat to MWAF funds.

But people from our village were poor – they had to work all day just to earn enough money for food. How could they afford to give away 300 kyat? For ordinary women, it is difficult to take part in these activities.

In spite of this, women from inside Burma are working hard to bring about real change in Burma even though they might not have been able to gain a full understanding about women's rights or gender equality due to the SPDC's strict controls.

There is no evidence that the SPDC is implementing any programmes to raise the status of women. Prominent women activists such as Nilar Thein, Sue Sue Nwe, Mee Mee are arrested for expressing their political beliefs, while many other women such as Phyu Phyu Thin and Naw Ohn Hla are threatened for their activities.

Furthermore, the SPDC even uses the government-controlled women's organisations as political tool to crack down on the women's movement inside and outside Burma.

There are some people who would like to do activities which are genuinely helpful for women. The problem is that they are not independent from the SPDC's control.

Burma is notorious for its mismanagement of health and education and its poor governance. If the SPDC would allow women's organisations to operate freely, they could work to protect women and improve their situation.

So I ask the SPDC: please try to be a good government to your own people and respect your duties within the international and regional community. A country is like a family; be good parents to your children. We would like to be proud to say we come from Burma.

Caught in the clutches: the fight to save child soldier

Mizzima - Wednesday, 29 October 2008 23:15

by The The & Mungpi

New Delhi - Myo Aung (name changed) had barely completed three months of military training when family members came to collect him from an army camp in which he unfortunately landed after straying away from home more than three months ago.

The look in his eyes as he spoke with his elder sister, who had come to talk with him and seek permission for him to quit the military, expressed profound regret at the situation fate had dealt him and a desire to reform his life.

But it was too late.

Officers from Battalion 111 of the Ayadaw-based military training camp in Sagaing Division's Wuntho Township said, "He [Myo Aung] cannot leave the camp, as he is so near completing the four months training."

Desperate family members pled with the officers to rethink their position, but their attempts only fell on deaf ears. They even produced his student card and recommendations from the local ward authorities, police station and his school head master, to prove that the boy was only 15 years old – but to no avail.

Instead, Tin Htay, a sister of Myo Aung who talked with a captain and sergeant, told how the officers curtly responded, "We cannot hand him back to you."

Myo Aung, who was studying in the ninth-standard at Phado Village High School in Kyauktagar Township of Pegu Division, left his home in June after his mother beat him for putting his bicycle in a pawn shop, Tin Htay explained.

But months later, on October 18, family members learned that he had landed in a military training camp for new recruits in Central Burma's Sagaing Division, about 400 miles north of his hometown.

Tin Htay said her brother, after wandering away from home, met with a soldier from the military training camp of Battalion 111 who asked him to join the training to become a soldier. Myo Aung took an interest and followed him, thinking it would be a chance for him to prove his mother and other family members that he could stand on his own two feet.

How wrong he would be.

"My brother told me of his unhappiness in remaining in the camp. But he said he feared to run away as they [the Army] would hunt him down, even at our house," Tin Htay said in a desperate tone.

"My brother said if he is caught deserting the camp he will be beaten to death," she said, adding that they have since given up on persuading the camp officers.

But, she said, they have not quit in their determination to get her brother out of the camp, and have approached Aye Myint, a labor rights activist in the town of Pegu, requesting him to help them submit a complaint to the International Labor Organization (ILO), which has a liaison office in Rangoon.

Aye Myint, who has been working to promote labor rights, said he agreed to submit the case to the ILO office in Rangoon.

"In fact, I have already drafted all the documents and will be submitting the complaint to the ILO on Friday," Aye Myint said.

While it remains unknown whether the complaint to the ILO liaison office will get Myo Aung out of the military camp, Aye Myint said Myo Aung's case was not the first such story he had heard.

He said, young boys in Burma often find themselves unintentionally in military camps, and in most cases find it difficult to quit though they no longer want to serve. This holds true even if, at the behest of their family, they are proven to be under-aged.

"In the past, through the help of the ILO liaison officer, we were able to withdraw about 15 boys from military camps," Aye Myint explained.

While it was not possible for the liaison officer to directly talk to camp commanders or officers and ask them to allow boys to quit, the liaison officer in Rangoon, who has in the past raised particular cases with high-ranking Burmese officials, has played a crucial role in gaining the release of some boys.

Burma's military rulers in early 2007 allowed the ILO to appoint a liaison officer and to establish a mechanism to report on forced labor cases.

While with the help of Aye Myint and the ILO liaison office in Rangoon, Tin Htay and her parents can keep their hope alive, it is not a lucky story for many young Burmese boys who end up in the military camps.

According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report in 2002, there are at least 70,000 child soldiers deployed in Burma, including those among both the Burmese Army and ethnic armed forces.

However, David Scott Mathieson, HRW's Burma consultant, said the figures are now largely irrelevant as they have not been updated in some time. He said the lack of reliable statistical information is basically due to the difficulties of getting information from Burma, whose rulers have strictly blocked the flow of information.

"Though we cannot confirm it, I think the use of child soldiers by the Burmese junta has remained more or less the same," said Mathieson, adding that the mode of recruiting child soldiers has largely become more informal in an attempt to avoid the glare of the media.

For its part, the junta on January 5, 2004, announced the establishment of the 'Committee for Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children' after attracting severe international criticism on the use of child soldiers, and claimed that the committee had effectively prevented children being recruited into the military.

But Mathieson, whose organization, HRW, released a report entitled 'Sold to be Soldiers' in 2007, said the committee has done little or nothing to prevent the recruitment of children into the military and the practice of child soldiers in Burma remains almost the same.

"I don't think the committee has done anything," he remarked.

Against this grim backdrop, Tin Htay said she worries that she will never see her brother come out of the camp to live a normal civilian life.

"But," she added, "I still hope my brother will come back to us again."

[BANGLADESH-MYANMAR: Bleak prospects for the Rohingya](#)

IRIN - 29 Oct 2008 08:19:59 GMT

COX'S BAZAR, 29 October 2008 ([IRIN](#)) - Thousands of Rohingya, Muslim residents from Myanmar's northern Rakhine State, continue to languish in southern Bangladesh almost two decades after fleeing Myanmar.

"Our lives are miserable," said Mostafa Kamal outside his makeshift hut, not far from the coastal city of Cox's Bazar.

His family fled across the Naaf River, a natural boundary between the two countries, in 1992, and their prospects for returning look bleak. According to the laws of Myanmar, they are stateless.

"If the government changes inside Myanmar, I will return, but I'm not hopeful," the unemployed 22-year-old said.

There are more than 200,000 Rohingya living in Bangladesh today.

Many were persecuted and denied the right to religious freedom, property, as well as to marry or travel without permission, according to Amnesty International, an international watchdog.

Over more than five decades, there have been three major influxes of Rohingya into Bangladesh.

In the last campaign launched against them in July 1991, approximately one-third of this ethnic, linguistic and religious minority fled en masse, resulting in the establishment of 21 refugee camps in Bangladesh.

But their reception in Bangladesh, an impoverished nation struggling to provide for its own burgeoning population, has not always been welcome.

"They don't want us here. They have never wanted us here," said Mohammad Ismail, who has lived much of his life in Kutupalong refugee camp, one of two remaining government-administered camps about 40km south of Cox's Bazar.

Tensions between local residents and the refugees often erupt over issues of jobs or local resources such as wood and fish, the 21-year-old said.

About 28,000 documented refugees remain, including 11,000 at Kutupalong and another 17,000 at a larger camp at Nayapara, farther south.

And while conditions inside the two camps remain grim, life for the estimated 200,000 outside the camps can be even worse.

Only documented refugees in the camps are provided regular food and non-food rations by the UN, as well as access to rudimentary health and informal primary school education.

Undocumented Rohingya

Since 1992, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has not been allowed to register newly arriving Rohingya living outside the refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar District.

Many were part of the 1991 influx who had returned to Myanmar, only to once again flee to Bangladesh, at which point they were no longer documented.

In 2007, however, UNHCR successfully negotiated with the government to relocate on humanitarian grounds about 9,000 unregistered Rohingya living in squalid and dangerous conditions along the banks of a tidal river in the border town of Teknaf to a safer site in Leda, about 3km from Nayapara.

The move was facilitated by Islamic Relief in mid-2008 after the agency constructed the new site with the support of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Most undocumented Rohingya, however, continue to live in surrounding villages and towns, or with the local population.

A lasting solution

Ideally, both the government of Bangladesh and UNHCR consider repatriation the most durable solution; it is also the long-term goal of most refugees.

"These refugees can only go back when conditions inside Myanmar are conducive and when they themselves feel it is safe to do so," Stephan Sinclair-Loutit, head of UNHCR's sub-office in Cox's Bazar, told IRIN.

A nominal third-country resettlement programme established in 2005, typically to Canada, was slowly expanding, but remained an option for only a limited few.

In the interim, UNHCR and its partners are working towards improving education and vocational training opportunities within the camps, with the hope of empowering camp residents - making them less dependent on outside assistance, allowing them greater mobility and the opportunity to work outside the camps legally.

Although the authorities generally turn a blind eye to those being employed outside, it was time to make that official, Sinclair-Loutit said.

"We would like them to be able to leave the camps freely. Freedom of movement and freedom of work not just in fact, but in rule," he said.

[Myanmar, North Korean foreign ministers meet](#)

AP – 27.10.08

By HYUNG-JIN KIM

SEOUL, South Korea — Myanmar's foreign minister arrived in Pyongyang on Monday and met his North Korean counterpart, more than a year after two of the world's most repressive governments resumed diplomatic ties.

Foreign Minister Nyan Win met his North Korean counterpart, Pak Ui Chun, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in the North Korean capital, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said in a brief dispatch.

KCNA did not provide further details.

It was the first official visit to North Korea by a foreign minister from the military-ruled Southeast Asian nation in 25 years.

Myanmar's top diplomat traveled to Pyongyang after attending the Asia-Europe Meeting — known as ASEM — in Beijing, a Myanmar official said in Yangon, the country's largest city. He spoke on condition of anonymity, saying he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Then known as Burma, the country severed relations with North Korea in 1983 following a bombing in its largest city by North Korean secret agents targeting South Korea's then-President Chun Doo-hwan. He was unhurt, but 21 people were killed, including four South Korean Cabinet ministers.

The two countries quietly have been working to normalize relations for the past few years, and agreed to resume diplomatic ties in April 2007.

Myanmar, which faces an arms embargo by the United States and European Union countries, also reportedly has bought weapons from North Korea.

Officials from the two countries have made some diplomatic visits since ties were restored. Myanmar's sports minister, Brig. Gen. Thura Aye Myint, recently traveled to North Korea. A delegation led by senior military officers also visited the North earlier this year.

[Myanmar man held after bomb threat: report](#)

AFP – 28.10.08

YANGON — A man has been arrested in Myanmar after making a phone call threatening to blow up government offices, state media said Tuesday, as security remained high after a string of blasts in Yangon.

Tin Myint, 41, was held on Friday, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported, three hours after he allegedly threatened to blow up the offices of a pro-junta organisation and a local police station in downtown Yangon.

The paper did not mention his motive for the threats.

Tin Myint's arrest came after a suspected bombmaker accidentally blew himself up on October 19 at his home in Yangon in the latest in a spate of blasts in the military-ruled nation.

Myanmar saw four bomb blasts last month, one of which killed two people and wounded 10 at a video cafe northeast of Yangon. Authorities later arrested an ethnic Karen rebel fighter in connection with the bombing.

The ruling junta has in the past blamed explosions on armed exile groups or ethnic rebels who have been battling the military rulers for decades, but the regime has also started pointing the finger at democracy activists.

State-run media in September accused two members of detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) of bombing pro-government offices in July.

The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never allowed it to take office and Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest almost constantly since.

US enforces law barring Myanmar gems

AFP – 28.10.08

WASHINGTON — The United States said it began enforcing Monday a law seeking to tighten an import ban on gems from military-ruled Myanmar in a bid to deprive the junta of precious revenue.

The Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act was approved unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush in July but the US Customs and Border Protection provided a grace period for the jewelry industry to adapt to the new rules.

The period expired on Sunday and the authorities on Monday began enforcing the law that aims to keep Myanmar's rubies and jade from entering US markets via third-party countries, officials said.

"After the grace period expired on Oct 26, 2008, CBP (Customs and Border Protection) will begin enforced compliance," the agency's spokesman, Jaime Castillo, told AFP.

Despite a longstanding ban on all Myanmar imports, gems from the impoverished country have entered the United States via third nations such as Thailand, China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, rights groups say.

The new law closes a loophole that allowed into the United States gems cut or polished in third countries, officials said.

The gems trade is one of the most lucrative sources of profit for the military rulers, accused of blatant human rights abuses and stifling democratic opposition.

New York-based Human Rights Watch called on US consumers to refuse buying from jewelers unless they ensured their gems were not from Myanmar, previously known as Burma.

"For years many American jewelry retailers have bought Burmese rubies and jade that help finance the military junta's brutality," said Arvind Ganesan, the group's director of the business and human rights program.

"Now it is illegal to support that trade."

In addition to the import ban, the US Treasury Department has put in place targeted sanctions on a number of Myanmar companies involved in the gem business.

Burma's bloody trade

New Statesman - 27 October 2008

Rajeshree Sisodia recently entered Burma, where she spoke with workers dependant on the country's exploitative jade mining industry. Here she reports for newstatesman.com

Stone collectors, or 'Yemase' at a mine in Hpakant. Source: Kachin Development Networking Group

Imperial green jade is unique to Burma - and jewellery made from it can sell for millions of dollars on the international market.

But the country's mining industry is built on suffering: forced and child labour, land confiscation, drug abuse, sexual exploitation and environmental damage - all of which, according to pro-democracy campaigners, have scarred the trade.

More than 20,000 people migrate, or are forced to work for mine companies which are either partly or completely owned by the nation's military leaders and its business partners.

From mining, to cutting, polishing, trading and selling, the regime's generals control the gem industry with a vice-like grip. Profits from the lucrative trade filter down only as far as the junta, which spends around

US\$330million a year on arms - roughly twice the amount it invests in health and education combined. This in a nation ranked among Asia's poorest; the average person earns less than US\$1 a day.

Arun Htin (not his real name), is 30. He is a jade stealer, who sifts by hand through dregs of soil dumped over ground by legal mine workers, for slivers of jade they may have overlooked.

"Our lives are very miserable and difficult," he says. "I use many kinds of drugs; heroin, alcohol," says Arun. "I smoke heroin which I get from drug-selling shops in Hpakant, in the northern Kachin state. The government soldiers do nothing to close the shops. The drug-sellers just give money to the authority leaders; they bribe them and sell it freely." The drugs help Arun dull memories of seeing his young friend Moe crushed to death while stealing jade last December. "I started to take heroin to feel happy, because my life is hard."

In the mines themselves, human rights violations are rampant, according to a report issued by the New York-based advocacy group 8-8-08 for Burma. It details "an environment of impunity and violence," created by the regime and its partners, in which locals who collect stones from the cast-off are regularly beaten, and even killed.

The report goes on to allege that company bosses and local authorities are complicit in both the sex and drug trades, which has in turn led spawned an HIV/AIDS epidemic.

[UNAIDS](#) estimates 240,000 people in Burma were living with HIV last year.

Growing demand for jade in China has also worried human rights campaigners. Beijing continues to sell arms to Burma and there are some 69 Chinese multinational companies working with the junta. Government regulations mean that foreign corporations are not allowed to own mines but can either form a partnership with an established Burmese company or with the junta.

China is also keen to tap into Burma's natural resources, in order to feed its growing energy needs.

"If you really want to understand China's approach to Myanmar, you can look at what's happening on the ground. Demand in China is leading its multi-national companies to increase their involvement in Myanmar's natural resources sector," says Matthew Smith, project co-coordinator of the Burma Project at EarthRights International.

"That in turn is contradictory to China's foreign policy of peaceful co-existence and has a demonstrative impact on the ground in terms of human rights abuses."

While activists have urged Beijing to do more in order to force the Burmese regime to improve its human rights track record, analysts have warned that China will not apply overt political pressure, for fear of creating instability in the region. However, informal lobbying is thought to take place, based on concerns for Burma's growing ethnic Chinese population and for Chinese business interests.

"I doubt China has the intention to bring about progress because both they and India have a notion of stability in Burma - and that stability is provided by the military," says Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political analyst based in Thailand. "If the military disappears, they think the sea of stability will disappear and Burma will disintegrate into ethnic conflicts."

He notes, however, that the Chinese government has begun speaking with Burmese opposition groups, to gauge the current situation. And he adds that political dialogue with the military, rather than a continuation of policies that isolate the junta, could potentially act as a springboard to implement gradual reform.

Arun Htin and others affected by the policies of this particularly brutal regime can only hope they live to see the end of the human rights abuses that have so brutally characterised the long rule of the Burmese junta.

[Burma's mining industry in doldrums](#)

Mizzima - Monday, 27 October 2008 12:46

by Htet Win

Rangoon: The mining industry in Burma is desperately trying to keep its head above water given the mounting taxes and fuel costs at the black market, sources in the mining industry said.

Talking about the ground situation in tin mining, an official belonging to one of Burma's biggest tin mine companies said recently that high costs and taxes are preventing the sector from flourishing. Rather there is a downside, despite the fact that tin price in the world market is rising.

The official who requested anonymity said tin mining companies need to pay 30 per cent of their production -- 10 percent as export tax and pay tax to the internal revenue department.

"The government takes 48 percent as tax, so we have to make do with only half of what we produce," he said. Add to this the high cost of fuel and dynamite that is used in the mines.

Given the escalating taxes and skyrocketing costs, the number of tin mining companies has been significantly reduced to 45 from some hundred in the last three years to seven this year, he said.

The Bernama news agency quoted a dealer on October 25 as saying the price of tin in the Kuala Lumpur Tin Market (KLTM) is expected to see range bound trading next week between US\$11,000 and US\$12,000.

A couple of mining companies that produce tin-tungsten mineral in Tanintharyi Division also agreed and said higher taxes not only create difficulties for the local companies but also prevent foreign direct investment in the sector, which needs high technology and huge capital.

The companies said miners requested the government to reduce the taxes for the development of the industry despite myriad challenges such as fears and uncertainties in world metal markets.

"But there was no response from the government," the companies said in separate interviews. In the same tune, it added that the military government's abject failure to encourage locally-run industries was to blame.

Meanwhile, a senior government official compared the situation with ASEAN countries where the governments taxes four percent for mineral production plus profit tax, a policy that is quite dissimilar to the Burmese one.

However, local mines had enjoyed supply of government fuel and dynamite, export and other tax exemption in the past.

The state granted tax exemptions for the mines when it signed production sharing contracts with the Ministry of Mines.

"But, the tax exemption was annulled five years ago and we could not buy fuel and dynamite with government subsidy," he said.

A Rangoon-based business writer said there would be some negative impact on Burma's export sector as global demand has slowed down. The mining sector would also face problems as entire minerals are exported, totally relying on China and other neighbouring countries, which are scrambling to organise a unified defense system -- a multi-billion dollars fund.

Citing official statistics, the writer said Burma earned about US\$ 8 million in the fiscal year 2007-08 from exporting concentrate and/or raw minerals including tin-tungsten and copper.

"The earning could be tripled or more if and when Burma refined and produced finished commodities," the writer said.

"That can be translated to the fact that Burma continues to miss better trade opportunities with those metal importing countries that are in need of different kinds of metals for their infrastructure development, he said.

Meanwhile, a mining geologist cited antimony mineral as an example, calling for miners in Burma to refine antimony before exporting to the world market as the pure mineral fetches better prices than selling just raw mineral.

Burma's mineral especially antimony, mainly used as a flame-retardant in plastics and textiles, is very strong and demand continues to grow. It is under valued when they export to the world market as all the antimony mineral is raw.

"If we can produce refined antimony, we will definitely get a higher price than the Chinese offer," the geologist said on condition of anonymity.

He described antimony as one of the common export minerals of Burma.

Even though Burma is not among the principal producing countries like China, France, Algeria, Mexico and Austria-Hungary, it has reserves that are considerable and production can be achieved at high levels.

The career-business geologist said Burmese miners need to try to build refineries to export pure antimony to the world market, where demand is higher for antimony.

Antimony mineral are exported to China, which is refined and resold to the world market at a higher price.

[Storm rumor reignites fear in Burma](#)

Monday, 27 October 2008 20:36

by Solomon

New Delhi - Incessant rain in Rangoon over the past two days has led to rumors that a major storm is heading for the city, igniting fear among residents and businessmen alike.

While there is no confirmation of the source of the rumor, it has caused fear throughout the city and particularly among businessmen in Burma's fishing industry, who are reportedly looking for places to be used as warehouses for their fishing products, a housing dealer who was reportedly approached by several fishing businessmen told Mizzima.

"Fishery businessmen are searching for temporary warehouses which are far away from the seashore to save their commodities in case any storm comes again," the dealer said.

The rumor that fresh storms are to make a landfall near Burma's former capital started spreading two days ago as incessant pounded Rangoon and other coastal regions.

Coming only months after Cyclone Nargis struck the region, the rumor has caused fresh fear among the people.

"Fishing boats are now stopping to sail and some are repairing, they are preparing their best to avoid another loss as happened during Cyclone Nargis," said a worker at Annawa Fishing Company in Rangoon's Pazuntaung Township.

Similarly, villagers in Thingangyi of Laputta Township, one of the villages worst hit by Nargis, are worrying about the threat of another storm after hearing a brief warning on state-owned television, Myanmar TV, on Sunday.

"We are prepared to move to another village, where we can somehow get far from the coast. Some people have already begun to move," a villager, who deals in the salt business, said.

He added that pouring rain had first hit their village four days previously, which made people worry that another cyclone such as Nargis might again strike, causing people to abandon their work and listen to the radio for information on the storm.

"We are not afraid of wind, even if it is strong, but if waves like Cyclone Nargis come again, none of us can escape," said the villager.

But unlike the fears of villagers and residents in Rangoon, the Myanmar Meteorological Department in Rangoon said there is no danger that a major cyclone as big as Nargis would again strike the delta region in the foreseeable future.

According to data on Monday morning, the present storm, which started in the mid-west of the Bay of Bengal, has moved to the northeast and across the coast between India and Bangladesh, entering Bangladesh, an official at the meteorological department said.

The storm is continuing to move towards the northeast and will weaken within 24 hours. However, because of the storm there will be a wave surge and winds with speeds of 30-40 miles per hour likely to blow in, the official said.

"The storm has gone and it is too far from Burma," the official added.

The official explained that the meteorological department announced a public warning that a small storm might head Burma's way within 24 to 36 hours, but that the rumors are based on exaggerated information.

The official admitted that, "People are worried, we have received numerous calls asking about the weather situation and on any likely storms heading this way."

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Indian Meteorological Department in New Delhi, which monitors and provides warnings on cyclones in the region, said there are no signs of cyclonic storms heading towards Burma at the moment.

"No, for the remainder of this month there are no tropical storms seen for Burma," B.P. Yadav, spokesperson of the Indian Meteorological Department said, but he added that reliable forecasts are not yet available for next month.

Burma's Wasted Intellectual Potential

Irrawaddy - Tuesday, October 28, 2008

By SAI SOE WIN LATT

As Burma's economy continues to shrink year by year, the domestic labor market cannot keep pace with the country's growing population or its expanding number of university graduates. As a result, thousands of graduates leave the country every year for the sake of their future.

The loss of an educated labor force to foreign countries is not a problem unique to Burma. The "brain drain" phenomenon is common one in most underdeveloped countries.

After a recent conversation with several old high school friends who are now working in Singapore, however, I realized that Burma's youthful university graduates are finding it especially difficult to find a place to use their skills. Both the regime that rules at home and the exile groups that operate abroad have failed to fully appreciate their value.

Many of my friends living both inside Burma and overseas seem to have lost their childhood dreams because of the country's failing education system. I recall that many of them were among the top 40-45 students out of 4-500 students for each grade—very promising young people who had the potential to succeed in high-status professions such as medicine or engineering.

But over past ten years since we all graduated from high school, their aspirations have been beset by a host of problems. The frequent closure of universities in the late nineties was one obstacle; the government's decision to move campuses to remote, out-of-the-way locations was another. The emergence of information technology drew some of them away from their earlier aspirations of becoming doctors or engineers. Some got Bachelor's degrees and either married and settled down in Burma or moved overseas to join the migrant workforce.

There are some who went abroad soon after graduating from high school to study in foreign universities. But even these people ended up studying subjects that would enable them to make a living as typical immigrants, instead of pursuing their original dreams.

In Singapore, many Burmese immigrants are university graduates and skilled laborers. They are engineers, computer technicians and managerial staff—the sort of people that commercial and industrial economies are after. But all seven of the people I spoke to complained about exploitation by Singaporean employers who refused to give them the official minimum wage and forced them to work overtime for little

or no extra pay. They also said that they were experiencing financial and social distress and even occasional racism in the workplace.

Working in such diverse fields as computer science, engineering, hotel management and accounting, these people could have made an important contribution to the Burmese economy if the opportunities had been there for them. They would have been leaders, decision-makers, bureaucrats, high-end professionals, technicians and university faculty, rather than immigrants in countries that exploit their skills and labor for cheaper wages.

But the Burmese regime is not alone in undervaluing the skills of these young people; pro-democracy groups have also failed to give them the opportunities they need to help them improve both their own and their country's prospects.

Burma's pro-democracy groups seem to be reluctant to recruit younger people. Instead of making scholarships available to them—and creating a future talent pool for their organizations—most democracy groups have shown little interest in cultivating the skills of the young. Some groups have had scholarship programs, but they fell far short of the hopes of young people who were prepared to make a commitment to the democracy movement. When opportunities for further study opened up in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they were quickly claimed by older members of the leading organizations.

These groups have failed not only to create new opportunities for study, they have also done little or nothing to make use of the skills of hundreds of students from opposition backgrounds or from border areas who have received an education in Asian or Western countries (not to mention those who came out of Burma directly).

Meanwhile, the Burmese government is recruiting technicians and administrators to support its military bureaucracy by sending them off to colleges and universities in Russia, Singapore and some other countries. But the exile groups are failing to offer any opportunities to those who have taken the initiative in seeking a university education either on very limited scholarship money or by financing themselves.

There have been instances of university graduates being recruited as "assistants" by some exiled organizations. Usually, however, they end up working as general office staff, while their upgraded skills and knowledge go unused. "Assisting" the aging leaders of such organizations seems to be the highest available positions for well-educated young people.

Countries like Canada, the US and other developed nations, on the other hand, are quick to take advantage of the skills of educated people to maintain their superior position in the global order. For example, the Canadian immigration system, which is based on a point system, attracts thousands of educated and skilled people each year by offering permanent residency and citizenship.

Some Burmese graduates in these countries have already been recruited as policy advisors, researchers and junior officers by host governments and government-funded institutions. Some have entered the private sector as technicians as well.

These countries can't be faulted for recruiting talented young Burmese; they are simply making use of the human resources that are available to them. If Burma wants to retain its best and brightest, both the government and opposition groups need to do more to recognize the need for new minds with fresh ideas.

Sai Soe Win Latt is a Ph.D. student of geography at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada.

[Don't defend the junta: After Cyclone Nargis things have gone from bad to worse in Burma. Yet it is all the west's fault, say the ICG](#)

guardian.co.uk, - Monday October 27 2008 21.30 GMT

Comment: [Benedict Rogers](#)

[Burma](#) is ruled by one of the world's most brutal regimes, guilty not only of suppressing democracy but of causing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. In response, the [International Crisis Group \(ICG\)](#) has lost the plot.

Earlier this year, [Cyclone Nargis](#) hit Burma. Unlike almost any other government in response to a natural disaster, the junta in Burma initially refused, and then restricted and diverted international aid efforts. Aid was [stolen by the regime \(pdf\)](#). Burmese people who [tried to help deliver aid](#) were arrested. The little aid that was officially distributed was given for propaganda purposes and often taken back when the photocalls were over. At least 140,000 people died and 2.5 million left homeless in the wake of the regime's deliberate neglect.

Following the cyclone another humanitarian crisis has unfolded, this time in [western Burma \(pdf\)](#). [Chin State \(pdf\)](#) has been hit by a [famine](#) caused by a [plague of rats](#) who multiply due to flowering of bamboo, a natural phenomenon that occurs every 50 years. True to form, the regime did nothing to prepare the people for the anticipated famine and has actively obstructed aid efforts. Officials took the [World Food Programme](#) to the wrong area, causing them to declare there was no famine. Since then, the WFP has revised its view – but the regime continues to block attempts to help the starving Chin people.

Burma's military is continuing an offensive against ethnic peoples in eastern Burma, causing further humanitarian misery. Since 1996, [more than 3,200 villages](#) have been destroyed, and a million people displaced. Civilians are shot at point-blank range, or [raped](#), taken for forced labour or used as human minesweepers. Children are taken off the streets and [forced to join the Burmese army](#), which has the highest number of child soldiers in the world. [Over 2,100 political prisoners](#) languish in jail, double the number of last year, subjected to horrific torture, and [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), Burma's pro-democracy leader and Nobel laureate, marked 13 years in house arrest last week.

The International Crisis Group says this is all our fault. In one of the [most extraordinary reports ever produced](#) by a responsible and until-now respected organisation, ICG provides a subtle defence of the junta and blames the international community for focusing too much on "the political struggle". It was understandable, ICG suggests, that the regime "hesitated to provide full, unfettered access for anyone claiming to be doing relief work", because the west has been putting the junta under so much pressure to stop killing its people. Western media is at fault too, according to ICG, for showing images of dead bodies being dumped by regime officials in the river – something that was "very embarrassing" for the poor generals.

While grudgingly conceding that the root causes of the crisis are political, ICG appears to reject the notion that the solutions are therefore political too. The report rightly calls for more aid to Burma, and support for civil society projects, and warns that the country is on the verge of a major humanitarian crisis. I agree. The stories and statistics speak for themselves. But ICG goes on to perpetuate the lie that pro-democracy activists oppose aid. In reality, it is campaign groups that have called for more aid.

It was the [Burma Campaign UK](#) and [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) that led the effort last year to get the [UK government to increase aid to Burma](#) – with success. We have been calling for more funding for civil society and democracy groups, for cross-border humanitarian relief and for [UN engagement for years \(PDF\)](#). Much of our time has been spent on getting the generals to talk with the [UN, the democracy movement and the ethnic groups \(PDF\)](#). What we have opposed is ICG's call for money to go into the pockets of the regime – for the simple reason that the junta will use such finance to expand their army, buy more guns and kill more people. I thought ICG was about conflict prevention. Now it seems they are about regime protection.

*Benedict Rogers is advocacy officer for south Asia at [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) and the author of *A Land Without Evil: Stopping the Genocide of Burma's Karen People*. He also serves as deputy chairman of the [Conservative Party Human Rights Commission](#). He has visited Burma and its borderlands more than 24 times and is now working on two new books about the country.*

[Will civil strife recur in Burma?](#)

UPI Asia - October 27, 2008

By Zin Linn - Column: Burma Question

Bangkok, Thailand — Burma is on the brink of fresh civil strife as many of the young generation have voiced dissatisfaction with nonviolence. The most intolerant citizens have called for a U.S. military

invasion or an armed struggle to overthrow the deep-rooted stratocracy in Burma, due to the junta's insistence on building a military-privileged country.

In addition, many people have a negative attitude toward China for encouraging the junta's brutal oppression of its own people.

Lieutenant-General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, first secretary of the State Peace and Development Council, has declared that the country will hold a general election in 2010, according to the junta's mouthpiece newspaper, New Light of Myanmar. Tin Aung Myint Oo said the country had made noteworthy improvements in recent months due to the implementation of a seven-step roadmap to democracy. He made these statements Oct. 24 at a ceremony to mark the 63rd anniversary of the United Nations.

On the same day, the junta demonstrated its blood-and-iron policy. Six opposition leaders from Mandalay were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 11 to 13 years by a military court, on charges of threatening the nation's "tranquility" and stirring up hatred. All six, including one woman, were executives of the National League for Democracy and were arrested in September last year in a nationwide crackdown on those who participated in the Saffron Revolution protests.

Tin Aung Myint Oo also said cooperation with the United Nations is the cornerstone of the nation's foreign policy. He said the country had consistently cooperated with the United Nations, citing as evidence the visits of several senior U.N. officials including that of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in May this year, following Cyclone Nargis.

However, the regime has turned a deaf ear to successive resolutions adopted by the U.N. General Assembly calling for a return to democracy in Burma through a tripartite dialogue between the junta led by Senior General Than Shwe, democratic forces led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and representatives of ethnic nationalities. It is clear that the junta has no plan to heed the U.N. call or to release political prisoners, a precondition to the tripartite dialogue.

Meanwhile, on Oct. 25, Asian and European leaders urged the ruling junta in Myanmar (Burma) to release detained politicians and lift restrictions on political parties. This call was made at the Asia-Europe Meeting in Beijing attended by leaders from more than 40 countries.

Asian and European leaders, in a joint statement following a two-day summit in Beijing, encouraged the junta to engage all stakeholders in an inclusive political process in order to achieve national reconciliation and economic and social development. They called for the lifting of restrictions placed on political parties and the early release of those under detention.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said the Beijing statement showed progress on the issue. But military rulers have shown no interest in heeding international calls for political reforms and the protection of human rights. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 13 years. Various human rights groups and activist groups have been calling on foreign government leaders, and the public, to demand she be freed along with all political prisoners in Burma.

The U.N. special rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Tomas Ojea Quintana, said last week he would ask the military regime to implement four key measures before the 2010 elections, to pave the way for democracy. These include a revision of domestic laws to ensure compliance with international human rights standards, the gradual release of all prisoners of conscience, and human rights training for the military.

Burma's ruling junta has been in the limelight again this year for its merciless handling of the Cyclone Nargis tragedy. The cyclone hit Burma on May 2-3, affecting some 2.4 million people in the Irrawaddy delta and in Rangoon district. Almost 140,000 people were killed or remain missing, according to the official figures.

Despite the natural disaster, believed the worst in the country's recent history, the regime insisted on holding a national referendum in May to approve a new Constitution designed to strengthen the military's leading role in politics, even under an elected government.

The referendum, held without international monitoring, was blamed for the junta's disinclination to let in emergency aid and relief workers during the first catastrophic weeks after the storm, which left some 2.3 million people in desperate need of supplies, water, shelter and medical relief.

A new report into the responses and impacts of Cyclone Nargis in Burma was released on Oct. 22 by the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. The report found that losses incurred by the cyclone accounted for 21 percent of the country's GDP for the previous fiscal year.

Inflation is currently around 40 percent. The disaster also caused a loss of an estimated 197 million working days. Severe rice shortfalls are expected in 2009, as the affected regions provided much of the country's supply. This will also impact exports to neighboring countries. Forty-two percent of households in the affected regions lost all their food stocks and 45 percent had only enough to last up to seven days soon after the cyclone hit.

In the Irrawaddy and Rangoon districts, 75 percent of health facilities and 91 percent of public education facilities were destroyed. More than one-third of those in these areas have some form of lung or stomach ailment. Some 23 percent of households in cyclone-hit regions reported psychological problems. A disproportionately high female mortality rate means many infants cannot get proper care and feeding. Those surviving are highly susceptible to being forced into the sex trade due to employment pressures.

These indicators show that people have been suffering all kinds of social breakdown that may pave the way toward a rebellion. Besides, the Burmese people are upset with neighboring China, which protects the inhumane junta not only to exploit the natural resources in Burma but also to be in command of the geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia.

Living in poverty for over four decades, the majority of the Burmese people have a bitter hatred toward the military dictatorship and the military elite. They also have an anti-China outlook due to China's use of its veto at the United Nations Security Council in favor of the rogue regime in Burma.

In brief, before these dissatisfactions and bitter hatred blow up, it is time for China, India and ASEAN to pressure the Burmese junta to comply with the United Nations' consecutive decisions. The world body should encourage regional players, including Japan, to push for a meaningful dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi and the incumbent military rulers as soon as possible.

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(Zin Linn is a freelance Burmese journalist living in exile. He currently serves as information director of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma in Bangkok, Thailand. He is also vice-president of the Burma Media Association, which is affiliated with the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers. He can be contacted at uzinlinn@gmail.com. ©Copyright Zin Linn.)

[On Burma, A Phony Realism](#)

WashingtonPost.com - Monday, October 27, 2008; A13

By Fred Hiatt

Almost a year ago, a Buddhist monk on the run from authorities [published an op-ed](#) in The Post advocating democracy for his Southeast Asian nation of Burma.

"It matters little if my life or the lives of colleagues should be sacrificed on this journey," U Gambira wrote, describing the nonviolent campaign for freedom. "Others will fill our sandals, and more will join and follow."

As he wrote, the regime already had arrested his father and brother, holding them as hostages to flush him out. It found and arrested him on the same day -- Nov. 4 -- that his article appeared.

Since then, U Gambira (a pseudonym; his real name is U Sandawbartha) has been forcibly deprived of his monastic robes and tortured in Burma's notorious Insein Prison. A half-dozen other members of his family have been arrested or forced into internal exile. At age 29, he has been charged with "crimes" that could bring years in prison.

I thought of U Gumbira's case as I read a [report](#) published last week by the International Crisis Group that is part of a swelling campaign urging the United States and other nations to engage with Burma's government, end many sanctions against the country and ratchet up humanitarian aid.

"Rather than shunning the authorities, the best way to help the people is to involve government officials at all levels and enlist their cooperation and support," the report suggests.

ICG is a nonprofit "working to prevent conflict worldwide," led by heavyweight former diplomats and government officials, and its latest report on Burma makes many good points. It argues that current policy has brought neither democracy nor prosperity to Burma's 50 million people, and so it should be rethought. It praises the regime for allowing international aid to flow, admittedly after some delay, to victims of last spring's [Cyclone Nargis](#).

What's curious, though, for a report advocating the supposedly pragmatic, realistic view, is how bloodless and detached from reality it is -- as if Burma were just another ineptly governed Third World nation.

"Government restrictions and intrusiveness" are a problem, it says, "as in many developing countries."

You could read it, in other words, and not know that during this past year of supposed progress, the number of political prisoners has doubled, to more than 2,100 (including 21 in prison for attempting to help cyclone victims without government permission). Or that while permitting some aid to flow to the Irrawaddy Delta in one part of the country, the Burmese army has been waging a war in eastern Burma so directly targeted at civilians that in June [Amnesty International](#) accused it of crimes against humanity. Or that [Reporters Without Borders](#), in its just-released index of media freedom, found Burma to be the world's fourth-worst (better only than Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea). The significance of that is not just the danger to Burmese journalists of honest reporting but the difficulty for the rest of us of knowing how bad conditions really are.

And you might not realize that organizations have curtailed aid in the past, not just because of politics in the West but because they couldn't prevent the regime and its pervasive network of secret police and front organizations from stealing money or using aid to further its political goals.

There's nothing new in the dispute between human rights and pro-democracy organizations, on the one hand, and aid-giving groups and foreign policy experts, on the other. When it comes to Burma, [President Bush](#) has identified with the democracy camp -- the ICG report lambastes [Laura Bush](#) and others for "megaphone diplomacy" -- and so has Sen. [John McCain](#). Sen. [Barack Obama](#)'s record is shorter, and the "realists" may think they have a chance with him.

But how realistic is that hope? Just last June, on the birthday of Burma's confined democracy leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), Obama promised to honor her "the way she would want it done: by honoring the people of Burma, and keeping faith with them in their struggle for freedom, justice and democracy."

The ICG report offers many recommendations to the [United Nations](#), donors and the West. But it has only three for Burma, none of which -- though the report acknowledges that "human rights abuses are a major contributor to poverty" -- has anything to do with easing repression. Meanwhile, it calls on grass-roots groups in the West to "cease ongoing consumer boycotts."

A policy rethink may be in order. But the idea that voters in Western democracies would support buckets of aid to a loathsome regime, delivered without political conditions and with a willing suspension of grass-roots pressure -- how realistic is that? You might almost say it's naive.

fredhiatt@washpost.com

[Authorities relax security on detained Burmese opposition leader](#)

Mizzima - Monday, 27 October 2008 14:25

by Mungpi

New Delhi - Burma's military rulers have since Sunday removed barbed wire barricades and reduced security around the Rangoon home of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, according to her party's spokesperson.

Nyan Win, spokesperson of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, said all barriers on the University Avenue Street, where the party leader's house is located, have been removed, along with the soldiers deployed to guard the street.

"As far as we can see, there are no more barricades and no soldiers in uniform," Nyan Win said. But he added that there were about two to three plainclothes security personnel still standing guard in front of Aung San Suu Kyi's house.

The Burmese democracy icon has spent 13 of the past 19 years in solitary confinement, mostly in her lakeside residence. Authorities had placed tight security around her house, cordoning off her estate with barbed wire barricades on both sides of University Avenue.

Usually, University Avenue is blocked with barbed wire wooden horses and uniformed soldiers standing guard at both the barricades blocking off the section of the road that passes in front of the Noble Peace Laureate's house in Rangoon.

"But now all vehicles and passers-by can go freely down the street," Nyan Win said.

Nyan Win, however, failed to speculate on the reason for the sudden change of security in front of the party leader's home, saying, "I am afraid, I cannot give any comment on the move."

But Nyo Ohn Myint, in-charge of the foreign affairs committee of the NLD in exile, said it could be in response to renewed pressure coming from the Asia-Europe Meeting, which recently concluded in Beijing.

"It is too early to welcome the changes. We will have to wait and see of what follows," said Nyo Ohn Myint. But he speculated that it could be the result of pressure from the Asia-European Meeting.

Asian and European leaders, who were meeting in Beijing for the 7th ASEM summit, on Saturday urged Burma's military rulers to implement an all inclusive political reform by starting with the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and to lift restrictions on political parties.

Nyo Ohn Myint said ASEM's call is the result of Beijing's growing frustrations over the junta's performance and that "the Burmese military government seems to be taking it seriously."

He added that Burma's military junta seems to be in a tight corner. "In any case, the ease of restrictions on Aung San Suu Kyi does not indicate the junta's willingness to implement a process of genuine political reform."

With a history of breaking promises and never fulfilling pledges, the junta's actions rarely translate into substantive changes, Nyo Ohn Myint said.

[First Burmese official visit to NKorea in 25 years](#)

ABC - October 27, 2008 22:14:42

Burma's foreign minister Nyan Win arrived in North Korea on Monday, becoming the most senior Burmese government official known to have visited the country since ties were severed in 1983 in the wake of a bomb attack in Rangoon in which North Korean agents were implicated.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency reports that Nyan Win was greeted at Pyongyang's airport by North Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Kim Yong Il and other officials.

The development comes a year and a half after the two governments agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations.

They fell out after North Korean agents attacked a South Korean delegation in Yangon on October 9, 1983, during an official visit by then South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan.

More than 20 people were killed in the bomb attack, including 17 South Koreans, four of them ministers, and more than 40 people were wounded.

Mr Chun was saved because his car had been delayed in traffic.

[Asia, Europe join calls for freedom in Myanmar](#)

AFP – 26 October 2008

BEIJING — Asian and European leaders urged Myanmar's ruling junta on Saturday to release detained opposition members and implement democracy in the poverty-stricken Southeast Asian nation.

The appeal followed heavy lobbying for the Asia-Europe Meeting here, chaired by Myanmar's ally China and attended by leaders from more than 40 countries, to come out strongly in support of democratic freedoms in the country.

"(Leaders) encouraged the Myanmar government to engage all stakeholders in an inclusive political process in order to achieve national reconciliation and economic and social development," they said in a joint statement.

"In this regard, they called for the lifting of restrictions placed on political parties and early further release of those under detention."

The call marked the latest pressure applied to the junta, which has ruled the country since 1962 and crushed large-scale democracy protests led by Buddhist monks in September last year.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso told AFP in an interview the mention of Myanmar in the joint statement showed progress on the issue.

"It's important to note, there is a clear reference for the need to release political prisoners, which was accepted by the Asian side," he said.

The European Parliament on Thursday passed a resolution calling on the summit to jointly appeal to the junta to release political prisoners.

The resolution, adopted unanimously, denounced "the arbitrary charges behind the arrests of many dissidents and the harsh conditions of detention," including widespread use of torture and hard labour."

Myanmar's National League of Democracy, led by opposition figure and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, said on Saturday that six of its members had been given long prison terms for their part in last year's demonstrations.

About 200 NLD members were detained during and after last year's "Saffron Revolution," so called for the colour of the monks' robes.

The protests began sporadically in August last year over a hike in fuel prices, but quickly escalated with 100,000 people eventually taking to the streets in the biggest uprising since 1988.

Myanmar's military regime launched a crackdown on September 26, killing 31 people, according to the United Nations, including a Japanese journalist.

The European MPs, meeting in Strasbourg, condemned "the fact that the number of political prisoners has increased from 1,300 to 2,000 in the aftermath" of the demonstrations."

They also criticised the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and called for her immediate release.

Led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD won a landslide victory in the last elections in 1990 but the junta never allowed them to take office. She has spent most of the intervening years under house arrest.

The European Union's Special Envoy for Myanmar, Piero Fassino of Italy, on Friday also urged the junta to release the democracy icon.

Her freedom "would pave the way for the opening of a dialogue between the military junta, the democratic opposition and the ethnic minorities," he said in a statement in Rome.

He said that was the only way to achieve "national reconciliation in Myanmar and a real democratic transition."

The ruling generals extended her house arrest by one year in May, provoking an international outcry. Myanmar is under US and European economic sanctions over its failure to move towards democracy.

The junta introduced a new constitution after a much-criticised referendum was held in May in the wake of a deadly cyclone that swept across the country.

The constitution paves the way for multi-party elections to be held in 2010 but bars Aung San Suu Kyi from standing.

Burmese Junta Sentences NLD Activists

Irrawaddy - Friday, October 24, 2008

By WAI MOE

Win Mya Mya, a well-known pro-democracy activist in Mandalay, and five other members of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) were sentenced to long prison terms on Friday.

The court sentenced the six members of the NLD's Mandalay Division to up to 13 years imprisonment, Nyan Win, an NLD spokesperson, told The Irrawaddy.

"Daw Win Mya Mya and U Kan Tun received 12 years, and U Than Lwin who was elected in the 1990 election, received eight years in prison," he said.

Min Thu from Mogok Township, received 13 years; Win Shwe from Kyaukpadaung Township received 11 years; and Tin Ko Ko from Meiktila Township received two years.

According to a Burmese human rights group, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the NLD members were charged with Act 505 (B) for meeting with American diplomats and 153 (A) for campaigning for political and human rights and the reopening of NLD offices in the country.

Win Mya Mya is a well-known pro-democracy activist in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city. Since 1988, she provided food and other material to political prisoners in Mandalay Prison. In return, authorities harassed her family business and arrested her several times during 20 years as a political activist.

She was injured and arrested when Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters were brutally ambushed by thugs backed by the junta in Depayin, Sagaging Division in northern Burma in late May, 2003. She has been in detention since the September 2007 demonstrations.

Than Lwin, who was a successful candidate for Madaya Township in 1990, is vice-chairman of the NLD's Mandalay Division. He was arrested during the 2007 demonstrations. He was also assaulted when he returned home from praying for the release from house arrest of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi at a Buddhist temple in the township in June 2007.

NLD spokesman Nyan Win said, "They didn't commit any crimes. So the jail term for them is unjust and unfair."

Asian (con)Fusion: Release Aung San Suu Kyi

Independent - Monday, 27 October 2008

By Andrew Buncombe

At her house on Rangoon's University Avenue, Aung Sang Suu Kyi sits and waits. Imprisoned off and on for the best part of two decades, this weekend marked 13 years of accumulated time she has spent either in prison or else under house arrest. Remarkably it also marked the first time that Western and Asian leaders came together to demand the release of political prisoners such as her.

At the Asian-European summit in Beijing, a statement was released which said: "Leaders... encouraged the Myanmar government to engage all stakeholders in an inclusive political process in order to achieve national reconciliation and economic and social development. In this regard, they called for the lifting of restrictions placed on political parties and early further release of those under detention."

Clearly, it's one thing for European countries that have little or no stake in Burma to call on the military junta to free prisoners and quite another for China, the regime's main backer, to do so.

Activists said they were pleased. "This is a significant breakthrough," said Mark Farmaner, of the Burma Campaign UK. "It's the first time we've had Europe and Asia come together in this way to demand real political progress in Burma. The demand to release political prisoners is particularly significant."

Last month, the regime said it was releasing 9,000 prisoners, including six political prisoners, one of whom I [spoke](#) with. (One of the six, U Win Htein, was promptly rearrested and returned to jail.)

But what seems clear is that however many prisoners may have been released - it is impossible to verify the numbers - the vast majority of the political prisoners imprisoned in the aftermath of last year's democracy protests remain in jail. Indeed, the Burma Campaign UK believes the number of such prisoners of conscience has doubled to 2,100 since last year. In December, UN Sec General Ban-Ki Moon is to hold unprecedented talks with the regime's leaders. Let's hope he remembers the woman at 54 University Avenue and the hundreds of others thrown behind bars by Burma's generals.

[Myanmar leader pledges to spare no efforts to hold general election in 2010](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-25 12:18:02 YANGON -- Myanmar leader Lieutenant-General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo has pledged that the country will spare no efforts to hold the general election in 2010, according to Saturday's official newspaper New Light of Myanmar.

Tin Aung Myint Oo, First Secretary of the State Peace and Development Council, made the pledge at a ceremony marking the 63rd anniversary of the United Nations Day in Nay Pyi Taw Friday evening.

Touching on Myanmar's recent political development, he said the country has achieved some significant progress in recent months as positive outcome of the implementation of a seven-step roadmap to democracy.

It is paving way for the fifth step of the seven-step roadmap which is for a multi-party general election to take place in 2010 after the already-concluded national convention in September last year and the national referendum on draft of a new constitution in May 2008.

Dealing with relations with the UN, he said cooperation with the world body is the cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy, adding that the country has consistently cooperated with it in various fields, citing the visits of several senior UN officials including that of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in May 2008.

He also underlined the relief and rehabilitation efforts made in full cooperation with ASEAN-led coordination mechanism, the Tripartite Core Group (TCG), which has brought together the government of Myanmar, the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Appreciation the role the TCG in effectively coordinating the relief and recovery efforts between Myanmar and the international community, he expressed belief that the mechanism will be able to lay down longer-term recovery plan too. With regard to globalization issue of facing diverse problems and daunting challenges in this era, he said no nation can act alone, maintaining that the UN should and could do more for the benefit of mankind through collective strength.

[Chinese Oil Giant Accused of Human Rights Abuses in Burma](#)

Irrawaddy - Friday, October 24, 2008

By WILLIAM BOOT

BANGKOK — More evidence has emerged of the steamrolling effect of China's tightening grip on the economic life of Burma.

A watchdog report alleging land theft and intimidation of local people by a major Chinese corporation comes on top of a report by an international human rights agency expressing concern at China's growing control over Burma's natural resources.

The latest report accuses the Beijing state-owned China National Oil Corporation (CNOOC) of human rights abuses and land theft in an oil prospecting venture on isolated Ramree Island in western Arakan State.

The accusations this week by Arakan Oil Watch (AOW) come less than a month after the US-based EarthRights International (ERI) expressed concern about China's increasing grip on Burma's natural resources.

Both reports cite the west coast Arakan region as particularly exposed to Chinese corporate control and influence, which they say is treading on local peoples' rights.

AOW accuses the CNOOC of a raft of abuses, ranging from land seizure to wanton pollution of rice fields and water systems with oil waste.

China already has ambitions to build an oil transshipment port on Ramree, an oil pipeline through Burma into southwest China's Yunnan province, and a gas pipeline from the port town of Sittwe.

In September, ERI published a survey that identified 69 Chinese companies engaged in oil, gas, hydropower development and mining across Burma—a 250 percent increase on the number thought to be operating in the country when a similar study was made one year ago.

“Given what we know about development projects in Burma and the current situation, we're concerned about this marked increase in the number of these projects,” ERI said.

This week's AOW report is more specific. The Chinese-led Ramree oil prospecting venture had “left hundreds of local islanders landless and unemployed and their environment befouled,” the report charges.

“The consortium confiscated 81 hectares, and offered the local owners 40,000 kyat (US \$31) for their land regardless of the size of their plots,” said Jockai Khaing, director of Arakan Oil Watch. “An estimated 500 to 1,000 local oil drillers were put out business.”

Ramree has been a source of near-surface crude oil well-pumping for many years by the islanders, providing a modest but steady income to supplement rice growing and offshore fishing.

But when the CNOOC and its partners were awarded the site by the military government for deeper oil exploration to test commercial viability, island land owners were rudely evicted, says the AOW, which has also produced photos to back up some of its allegations.

Observers note that the actions by CNOOC are similar to the methods still used throughout rural China when entrepreneurs in cahoots with communist party officials want to pursue a development against local peoples' wishes. They simply steamroller opposition.

AOW, an environmental and human rights group, said the CNOOC consortium “left behind such a trail of abuses and environmental contamination on Ramree Island that outraged locals attacked their facilities.”

The AOW says its informants claim that local people looted a CNOOC installation in revenge before dozens of islanders fled Burma to avoid arrest by the authorities.

CNOOC partners in the Ramree oil venture are Golden Aaron, Asia World Company and two other state-owned Chinese oil-service firms.

Golden Aaron is registered in Singapore but is owned by Burmese businessman Steven Law. Asia World has close connections with the Burmese junta chiefs and is reportedly involved in the Ramree deepwater port project.

Both companies are on a US sanctions blacklist aimed at the military regime's business activities.

The Ramree venture is reportedly now on hold after the initial exploratory drillings, but local residents have been told that CNOOC will return to begin commercial production, said AOW.

ERI says Burma has become “geopolitically significant” to China for natural resources, but perhaps most significantly is Burma's position on the edge of the Indian Ocean, making it a “particularly desirable partner in China's pursuit of energy security.”

China is reportedly building a deep-draught port on Ramree to handle ocean-going supertankers carrying oil from Africa and the Middle East. Transshipping the oil on the Burmese coast and piping it up through

Burma into China is quicker—and probably more secure—than vessels taking the long route to southern Chinese ports via the congested Malacca Strait between Indonesia and Malaysia.

China and other Asian countries have moved into the void left by natural resources-tapping Western firms curbed by US and European sanctions against the Burma military regime.

But ERI says China's hunger for energy makes Burma an inevitable target.

"The surge of Asian investment in Burma's oil and gas sector is not due to western sanctions, but simply to Asia's increasing demand for natural resources," ERI's Burma Project coordinator Matthew Smith told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday. "Chinese and Indian companies would be investing in Burma regardless of western foreign policy, and most of them likely dislike sanctions because they leave them alone to deal with the inherent risks of doing business with the generals.

"An oil and gas project in Burma cannot proceed without human rights impacts, and Asian governments would do well to recognize that promoting and protecting human rights in Burma now will do more for their own long-term energy security."

In its report of CNOOC's Ramree island abuses, AOW cites the Chinese company's own 2005 Code on Corporate Social Responsibility: "We believe that community and social acceptance is the important foundation for our long-term development. Since establishment, the company has been committed to building reciprocal and mutual trust friendly relations with stakeholders."

ANALYSIS: Asian favourite: John McCain and Barack Obama both have first-hand experiences in Asia. The region is split between support for McCain's free trade, Obama's diplomacy.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur - October 26, 2008

Republican John McCain, 72, a decorated war hero, was shot down on a bombing mission in 1967 over North Vietnam, captured and tortured in the notorious "Hanoi Hilton," where he was kept as a prisoner of war until 1973.

Democrat Barack Obama, 47, spent part of his peripatetic youth in Indonesia, where he attended a public Muslim school in Jakarta between 1969 and 1971.

Different Asian experiences indeed.

"Scholars tend to see Obama's Asian experience as more relevant to today's problems," said Surat Horachaikul, an expert on international relations at Chulalongkorn University.

"At least, under Obama the war on (terrorism) will be revoked and other methods will be used to deal with terrorism. Islam needs to open up and they don't see Republicanism ideas as able to solve these problems," added Surat, citing his fellow scholars in Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia.

Of course, the next president of the US will be judged in Asia by the performance of outgoing President George W Bush.

While Bush's domestic legacy may be a bitter one, battered by the sub-prime mortgage crisis, financial meltdown and looming recession, in Asia, his administration's performance has left good impressions in some places.

For instance, both Bush and wife Laura were staunch supporters of the pro-democracy struggle led by Aung San Suu Kyi in military-run Burma.

That policy is unlikely to change no matter who becomes US president.

"Burma is a rare bipartisan issue in US politics," said Aung Din, executive director of the US Campaign for Burma.

"Both Republican and Democrat agree on strong US policy on Burma, which include imposing strong economic sanctions against the junta; increasing strong diplomatic pressure on China, India and ASEAN to work together with the US on Burma; and pushing the UN Security Council to take effective action on

Burma," he added, noting that both McCain and Obama were the major sponsors of the past three Senate resolutions against the junta.

Nor are dramatic changes expected in Sino-US ties.

China, although still riled by the recent arms sale to Taiwan, is relatively satisfied with their US relations, and convinced that neither candidate will alter those relations much.

"Although the two candidates might be a little bit different - Obama might take a protectionist policy on trade; McCain is really tough on security issues - we see that both of them claimed they would like to maintain the sound development of Sino-US relations," said Shi Yinhong, an international relations expert at Peoples University in Beijing.

Given the serious US economic woes, the next president is likely to be keen to keep on Beijing's good side, and downplay such issues as human rights, he said.

"Any US president can hardly expect a more and more confident China to accept ... criticism from the US," said Shi.

More interesting will be the next president's approach to India, where Bush can claim considerable achievements.

US-India relations saw an unprecedented transformation during the Bush administration, removing years of Cold War bitterness and leaving ties between the world's largest democracies at an all-time high.

Both the Bush administration and the Singh government count the recently signed bilateral civilian nuclear agreement as a significant foreign policy achievement during their tenures.

While McCain is expected to broadly continue the Bush administration's policies and foster a special and close relationship with India, Obama's ascent is viewed more circumspectly, particularly because of his views on economic issues, including his criticism of outsourcing of jobs to India as well as his earlier attempt to block the civilian nuclear deal.

"An Obama administration could have more emphasis on non-proliferation objectives, which could make the bilateral nuclear deal run into rough weather," said one Indian foreign ministry official who asked to remain anonymous.

"But we are certain that he or anyone else will not be hostile to India. This is because the US-India relationship now has a dynamic of its own," he added.

And then there is the economy, one Bush legacy which most nations would seem to want to leave behind.

Much of the world has blamed Bush and his deregulation policies for bringing the world to the brink of the worst financial crisis since 1929, and the financial crisis has delivered new support for Obama at home.

But although Asian markets have suffered, Asian governments are more worried about free trade and what a Democratic president like Obama could mean for globalisation.

"McCain is for an open economy, has no problems with outsourcing and free trade," said retired Maj Gen Deepankar Bannerjee, director of Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, a New Delhi-based strategic think tank.

"Barack Obama on the other hand has said he would prevent outsourcing jobs and protect the US economy through restrictive practices that may not be helpful for India's economy," he added, while noting that even so, Obama is certainly the more popular candidate among the Indian masses.

"Obama would largely be positive for the world and India," said Cherian Samuel of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, another Delhi-based strategic think tank.

[Free Aung San Suu Kyi - Sein Win and Jared Genser](#)

The Age - October 24, 2008

Today is a sad anniversary in the bitter tyranny of Burma's history.

TODAY marks 13 years that the world's only imprisoned Nobel peace prize laureate, and Burma's democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has spent under house arrest in her country.

Stoically battling ill health and relentless in her pursuit of freedom for her people, The Lady's unjust imprisonment is a powerful reminder of a brief moment of freedom realised by Burma's people and the dream that remains unfulfilled.

While some governments find it convenient to treat the symptoms of this regime's malfeasance — the terrible humanitarian challenges facing its people — the root cause of these problems is the fundamental lack of accountability from a military dictatorship ruling with an iron fist.

Burma's recent engagement with the international community in the wake of cyclone Nargis is yet another skilfully deployed smokescreen by the regime, designed to postpone any meaningful discussion of political reform.

Nevertheless, the release of Suu Kyi and that of other political prisoners in Burma remains the only true bellwether to measure whether Burma is serious about political reform.

Suu Kyi led her National League for Democracy to an overwhelming victory in 1990. The NLD and its allies gained 82% of the total vote in what was the last free and fair election in Burma. The military, in power since a coup in 1962, refused to recognise the result and annulled the parliament.

The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma is comprised of those elected officials, never allowed to take office, who remain in exile.

Suu Kyi has been in and out of house arrest for most of the past 19 years, even since before those elections. She has been there non-stop since 2003, following a rally in Depayin, where regime thugs murdered more than 70 democracy activists in an attempt on her life. She escaped with minor injuries.

Suu Kyi's release has been called for by sources as diverse as US first lady Laura Bush, financier and philanthropist George Soros, Nobel peace prize laureates Desmond Tutu and Lech Walesa and entertainers Bono and Jim Carrey.

In May last year, 59 former presidents and prime ministers, including Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton, Vaclav Havel, George Bush snr and Benazir Bhutto, signed a letter urging her release. All recognise that democracy in Burma will remain a distant dream until Suu Kyi, along with about 2000 other political prisoners, is released and an inclusive and time-bound three-party dialogue between the NLD, ethnic groups, and the junta achieves a restoration of democracy to Burma.

This much was confirmed again in a recent report by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. He noted his frustration with the junta's unwillingness to agree to talks with Suu Kyi.

"Now is the time," he said, "for the military and the NLD to find ways to talk to each other and work together in the interest of the nation."

The fact that one of our generation's bravest and most enduring servants of human rights and justice remains in detention diminishes us all and mocks our notion of a global community.

That all the weight behind the campaign to release her has failed to move the junta stands as a victory for oppression and a distinct failure of the international political system.

Yet the shallow realities ruling the Burmese regime expose an intrinsic weakness in its administration. This is emphasised in Suu Kyi's famous "Freedom from Fear" speech, delivered in absentia in Strasbourg in 1991, when she was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize.

In her speech, Suu Kyi said that "within a system which denies the existence of basic human rights, fear tends to be the order of the day ... A most insidious form of fear is that which masquerades as common sense or even wisdom."

She said: "Fear is not the natural state of civilised man." In Burma, as elsewhere, dictatorship is against nature.

As such, in the name of a generation, we call for the immediate release of Suu Kyi and her fellow political prisoners. We urge the international community, and especially Ban and the UN Security Council, to end

one of the most sustained, corrosive, and damaging regimes of our era and to push for the beginning of the end of Burma's decades-long oppression.

In doing so, we call for the restoration of democracy to Burma and for the natural state of Burma, of a peace-loving, tolerant and prosperous society, to once again flourish.

All must know that this will not occur while Suu Kyi and her colleagues remain imprisoned.

Sein Win is prime minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. Jared Genser is president of Freedom Now and counsel to Aung San Suu Kyi.

[Suu Kyi Marks 13th Year of House Arrest by Myanmar's Military](#)

Bloomberg - 24 October 2008

By Michael Heath - Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi marks 13 years under house arrest today, as a United Nations human rights official said it will take decades for democracy to take hold in the country.

``Restoration of full democracy cannot happen overnight, it will take generations," Tomas Ojea Quintana told the UN General Assembly in New York yesterday.

Suu Kyi, first arrested in 1989, has had only brief periods of freedom from detention in her home in Yangon since her party won Myanmar's last elections in 1990. The results were rejected by the military, which has ruled the country formerly known as Burma since 1962.

The Bush administration used today's anniversary to renew its call on Myanmar's generals to free the 63-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner.

``Over the many years Aung San Suu Kyi has endured unlawful detention she has remained a steady beacon of hope and inspiration to those seeking a peaceful, democratic Burma," Robert Wood, a State Department spokesman, said in a statement issued in Washington yesterday.

He reaffirmed U.S. support for UN efforts to secure the release of political prisoners in Myanmar and encourage democracy there.

``Releasing Aung San Suu Kyi would be a first step toward Burma's reintegration into the international community," Wood said. Suu Kyi's most recent period of detention began in 2003 and the junta extended it by one year on May 27.

Government-in-Exile

Sein Win, head of the Burmese government-in-exile, and Jared Genser, Suu Kyi's U.S. lawyer, said in a statement marking today's anniversary that her continued detention ``diminishes us all and mocks our notion of a global community."

Sein Win's National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma comprises officials who were elected in 1990. Suu Kyi's ``imprisonment is a powerful reminder of a brief moment of freedom realized by Burma's people," they wrote, noting that Suu Kyi is the only Nobel Peace Prize winner in prison.

Suu Kyi, daughter of independence leader General Aung San, emerged as an opposition leader during an economic crisis in the late 1980s.

In 1990, the junta agreed to multiparty elections and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won 396 of the 485 seats contested. It demanded negotiations on a new assembly, though the regime said the ballot was to choose a new government that it would direct and refused to recognize the result.

The junta staged a referendum on a new constitution in May to prepare for elections in 2010. The European Union and U.S. denounced the process as a ``sham" designed to extend the military's grip on power.

``To get a civil government will take time," Quintana told reporters yesterday.

He called on the international community to press the regime to take four steps: revise domestic laws that limit basic rights; set up an independent judiciary; release political prisoners; and conduct human rights training for the military.

[Suu Kyi's lawyer asks Myanmar junta for further appeal meeting](#)

AFP – 24 October 2008

YANGON — Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer has requested another meeting with her to discuss an appeal against her detention, amid repeated international calls for her release, her party's spokesman said Friday.

Kyi Win asked the ruling junta for permission to meet with the Nobel peace prize winner, who has spent most of the past 19 years locked away in her lakeside home in Yangon, the National League for Democracy's Nyan Win said.

"Lawyer U Kyi Win has asked the authorities to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi again to give her receipt of her appeal and to get further instructions for it," Nyan Win told AFP.

"We haven't received any reply yet. But the authorities are likely to allow him to meet her," he said.

The authorities acknowledged receipt of Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal on October 9 but have not yet indicated whether they will accept the case.

Aung San Suu Kyi last met with Kyi Win in September to finalise her appeal.

The 63-year-old rarely meets with anyone except her lawyer and doctor and refused a visit from United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari in August, apparently in protest at the lack of progress he was making on political reform in Myanmar.

On Thursday leaders around the world marked the 13th anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by renewing calls for the government to release her.

A US State Department spokesman urged the "unlawful detention" to end, while the European Parliament joined rights groups in urging Asian and European leaders meeting in China this week to appeal to Myanmar for liberal reforms.

Meanwhile, the United Nations' expert on human rights in Myanmar, Tomas Ojea Quintana, announced a four-point plan of political reforms he is asking the junta to implement before elections due in 2010.

The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 elections but the junta never allowed it to take office.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962.

[US, EU Call for Release of Suu Kyi](#)

Irrawaddy - Friday, October 24, 2008

By LALIT K JHA - NEW YORK — The release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi should be the first step towards the reintegration of Burma with the international community, a United States official said on Wednesday.

The call for Suu Kyi's release was made in a US State Department statement released in Washington on the eve of the 13th anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest.

Supporters of Suu Kyi have planned a series of meetings and demonstrations across the world. The US Campaign for Burma on Wednesday announced that it would hold protest demonstrations at the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

"As the Burmese regime's single most important supporter, China holds the key to Aung San Suu Kyi's release," said Aung Din, the executive director of US Campaign for Burma. "Nelson Mandela was locked up for decades before the world came to his aid— Aung San Suu Kyi shouldn't have to wait that long."

The US statement said: "As of October 24, 2008, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent a total of 13 years under house arrest. We again call upon the Burmese regime to immediately and unconditionally release her and the more than 2,000 political prisoners it holds."

Observing that October 24 also marks the anniversary of the coming into force of the United Nations charter, the statement said: "We renew our support for the UN efforts, under the leadership of Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon, to obtain the release of Burma's political prisoners and encourage Burma to move toward democracy."

"We further join the United Nations and the rest of the international community in calling upon the regime to engage credibly in an inclusive, time-bound dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and ethnic minority leaders to bring about a genuine democratic transition."

Meanwhile, the European Parliament called on Asian and European leaders at a meeting in Beijing on Friday and Saturday to launch a joint appeal to the Burmese military government for the release of all political prisoners.

European MPs, meeting in Strasbourg, condemned the continued detention of Suu Kyi and called for her immediate release. The parliament also denounced "the arbitrary charges behind the arrests of many dissidents and the harsh conditions of detention of political prisoners, including widespread use of torture and hard labor."

[US presses Myanmar to free Aung San Suu Kyi](#)

AFP – 23 October 2008

WASHINGTON — The United States on Thursday marked the 13th anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest by renewing its call for Myanmar's military rulers to swiftly release the pro-democracy leader.

"As of October 24, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent a total of 13 years under house arrest," State Department spokesman Robert Wood said in a statement.

"Over the many years, Aung San Suu Kyi has endured unlawful detention, she has remained a steady beacon of hope and inspiration to those seeking a peaceful, democratic Burma," he said.

"We again call upon the Burmese regime to immediately and unconditionally release her and the more than 2,000 political prisoners it holds."

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, 63, has been confined to her home for 13 of the past 19 years. Her National League for Democracy swept elections in 1990, but was never allowed by the military to take power.

Recalling that Friday is also the anniversary of the coming into force of the United Nations charter in 1945, Wood reiterated US support for UN efforts to obtain the release of political prisoners in Myanmar and encourage its shift to democracy.

"Releasing Aung San Suu Kyi would be a first step toward Burma's reintegration into the world community," he said.

"We further join the United Nations and the rest of the international community in calling upon the regime to engage credibly in an inclusive, time-bound dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and ethnic minority leaders to bring about a genuine democratic transition."

Myanmar -- whose former name Burma is still used by the United States and other Western nations -- has been ruled by successive military juntas since 1962, 14 years after its independence from British colonial rule.

[EDITORIAL: World turning a blind eye to Suu Kyi's fate](#)

The Nation - October 24, 2008

Failure of leaders to consistently put pressure on the junta has entrenched their hold on Burma

Today, Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will have been incarcerated for 13 years. The more the appeals for her release - from the United Nations, Asean and numerous world leaders - the more the Rangoon junta leaders harden their resolve not to let her free. Why? They have learned that in the real world, nobody really cares about others. They do so for a period of time, but not all the time. It has been extremely unfortunate for the people of Burma and Suu Kyi since 1988. Whenever the international community came together, something happened that diverted attention away from Burma.

When Cyclone Nargis hit Burma in early May, the world's sympathy immediately and readily poured into Burma to help the people. Suddenly, the atrocities of the armed soldiers against protesting monks and the ordinary people were pushed to the back burner. Of course, the junta leaders have benefited from the influx of financial aid as never before seen. They have not changed a thing and seriously they do not need to. Obviously, international humanitarian organisations have used the Burmese crisis for their own benefit.

The Western world and international organisations automatically dropped their hardline criteria because they wanted to help the cyclone-affected Burmese people. Earlier Burma's recalcitrance to allow foreign relief and rescue teams caused additional deaths. Now, nobody is talking about political reforms and ongoing political suppression. International organisations are happy because they have earned a name for themselves by helping the poor Burmese. They said more aid should be channelled to the junta leaders and their organisations because they will learn how to deal with foreign assistance. Never mind if they have benefited from all the assistance. After all, the Burmese people will get direct help. The problem is, the junta has not given anything away that could facilitate national reconciliation and dialogue.

Apparently, the junta leaders are very confident that their sevenpoint road map will serve as the main instrument to eventually establish their legitimacy. Come 2010, it will be a fait accompli. The ongoing global financial crisis will take the focus away from Burma. UN Secretary-General Ban Kimoon believes that he can influence junta leader General Than Shwe to free Suu Kyi because he has made a good impression on the general. He is scheduled to visit Rangoon on December 19 after the AseanUN summit in Bangkok. Ban should not risk his reputation and that of the UN by such an endeavour. The UN's special envoy on Burma, Ismail Gambari, needs to improve his performance. He has yet to facilitate or bridge the gap between the junta and the opposition.

From the regional point of view, it is a win-win strategy for Burma. Just look at Thailand, which is in the political doldrums. As long as the Asean chair is in perpetual chaos, it cannot raise the Burma issue because it would be a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Indeed, it was fortunate that Singapore was the Asean chair last year during the Saffron Revolution because the island republic could issue a strong statement condemning the junta's heavy use of arms against protesters.

At this juncture, it seems that Western countries as well as Asean are sharing similar assessments - that the Burmese regime is very strong and its grip on power and the people is absolute. Nothing can be done about it. The best way is to work with the junta and take part in its political schemes. Conventional wisdom believes this is the best way because the regime might crack. Refusing to take part in the political process would immediately cut off future bargaining chips that the opposition or democracyloving people have.

It is heartrending to look into the future of Burma, knowing full well the political hypocrisy and vanity surrounding this issue. One can only hope that Suu Kyi will remain strong and robust and in good spirit. This is going to be a long battle.

[Quintana: Human rights steps urged](#)

AFP/ Straits Times - Oct 24, 2008

A UN expert on human rights in Myanmar is urging four key measures to pave the way for democracy.

UNITED NATIONS - THE United Nations' independent expert on human rights in Myanmar said on Thursday he is asking its military regime to implement four key measures before elections due in 2010 to pave the way for democracy.

Mr Tomas Ojea Quintana said these include a revision of domestic laws to ensure compliance with international human rights standards, gradual release of all prisoners of conscience, and human rights training for the military.

Presenting his report to a UN General Assembly committee that deals with human rights issues, Mr Quintana said his fourth request was for an independent judiciary necessary to ensure the rule of law.

Mr Quintana, an Argentinian who took over in May as special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, and who visited the South-east Asian nation in August, conceded that 'restoration of full democracy cannot happen overnight'. 'It will take generations,' he said. 'In the meantime, tangible, achievable, step-by-step benchmarks should be fixed.'

He welcomed the Myanmar regime's release of 9,002 prisoners, including seven prisoners of conscience, last September, but deplored that one of the seven was re-arrested shortly after being set free.

He voiced hope he would be allowed to return to Myanmar before the end of the year.

Mr Quintana urged the Myanmar military and non-state armed groups not to use violence against unarmed civilians, to halt recruitment of child soldiers, the displacement of villagers as well as the use of anti-personnel landmines and of forced civilian labour.

Early this month, the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay of South Africa, also called for the release of Myanmar's political prisoners.

'We believe that there are still 2,000 political prisoners in Myanmar,' said Mr Pillay. 'We are asking the authorities in Rangoon to free them.'

She described the detention of Myanmar's pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi as 'completely illegal, even in respect of the country's law'.

[Full democracy in Myanmar will take generations to achieve – UN expert](#)

UN News Centre - 23 October 2008

Democracy will take decades to take root in Myanmar, and in the meantime tangible, step-by-step benchmarks should be set up to spur progress in the Asian country, an independent United Nations human rights expert told the General Assembly today.

Addressing the Assembly's third committee (social, humanitarian and cultural), Tomás Ojea Quintana said assistance, expertise and cooperation with Myanmar should be provided to help its authorities realize those benchmarks.

"Restoration of full democracy cannot happen overnight; it will take generations," he said.

Mr. Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, told the committee that it was not enough for the Assembly to adopt resolutions about the country – it should also provide the resources to implement those resolutions.

While Myanmar's Government has the prime responsibility to protect and promote human rights within the country's borders, the international community should stand ready to help at any time.

Earlier this month, in a report issued following his first visit to Myanmar, Mr. Quintana proposed that four core human rights elements be implemented: the revision of domestic laws that limit fundamental rights, the progressive release of the estimated 2,000 prisoners of conscience still in detention, the reform and training of the military so that it conforms with human rights, and changes to the judiciary so that it is fully independent.

These four elements must be completed before national elections are held in 2010, the Special Rapporteur told journalists after his presentation to the Assembly committee.

In response to questions, he called for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League of Democracy (NLD) who is under house arrest.

"She's under arbitrary detention," Mr. Quintana said, describing the situation as a serious violation of human rights and warning that he was not confident she would be released in the near future.

Mr. Quintana, who serves in an independent and unpaid capacity, said he hopes to visit Myanmar again before the end of the year.

After he addressed the Assembly committee, Myanmar's representative said Mr. Quintana had given an independent, caring and fair-minded perspective on the country, and noted that he had drawn attention to positive developments, such as the recent release of a significant number of prisoners and plans to hold multi-party elections.

But he said the Special Rapporteur had also included unsubstantiated information in his presentation, often based on what he said were distorted allegations from exiles, and had unfairly criticized the Government's response to the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Nargis in May.

[EU-Asia summit should seek release of Myanmar dissidents: MEPs](#)

AFP – 23 October 2008

STRASBOURG — The European Parliament on Thursday called on Asian and European leaders meeting in Beijing this week to launch a joint appeal to the Myanmar junta for the release of all political prisoners there.

In a non-binding resolution, adopted unanimously by the 68 euro deputies still present at the end of a four-day sitting, the parliament denounced "the arbitrary charges behind the arrests of many dissidents and the harsh conditions of detention of political prisoners including widespread use of torture and hard labour."

The European MPs, meeting in Strasbourg, also deplored "the fact that the number of political prisoners has increased from 1,300 to 2,000 in the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution of September 2007."

The MEPs in particular condemned the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate who has been for the most part under house arrest since her victory at the last democratic elections in 1990, calling for her immediate release.

The European Parliament urged the Asian and European leaders, meeting in an ASEM summit in Beijing Friday and Saturday, "to jointly appeal to the Myanmar military authorities to release all political prisoners."

Forty-three heads of state and government from the 27 EU nations, the 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and six other Asian countries, including economic heavy hitters China, India and Japan, will gather in the Chinese capital.

[Amnesty urges EU to denounce Myanmar rights abuses](#)

AP/IHT - Thursday, October 23, 2008

BRUSSELS, Belgium: Amnesty International urged European leaders Thursday to take up human rights issues with Myanmar at this week's Europe-Asia summit.

Myanmar's military government, which has violently suppressed pro-democracy protests, will be represented at the summit in Beijing on Friday and Saturday.

"This is a rare opportunity to engage in direct dialogue with the authorities of Myanmar, which should not be missed" said Nicolas Beger, director of the human rights organization's EU office in Brussels.

"As co-chair, the French presidency can ensure that the serious human rights situation in Myanmar is given the attention it deserves," he added. France holds the EU's rotating presidency.

Myanmar's military, which seized power in 1988, refuses to recognize the results of a 1990 election that gave a landslide victory to the party led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. She has been in detention for about 13 of the past 19 years and is one of a reported 2,000 political prisoners.

The Asia-Europe Meeting, held every two years, was established in 1996, and currently has 45 members, including Asian and European countries, the European Commission and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Myanmar joined in 2004 despite reservations of the EU, which has imposed diplomatic and economic sanctions on the government of Myanmar, also known as Burma. The human rights issue was raised at the 2006 summit in Helsinki, Finland.

[Monk flees brutality in Burma](#)

The Guardian Weekly- Thursday October 23rd 2008

*October 24 marks 14 years of house arrest for Burma's democratic leader elect Aung San Suu Kyi. There are about 2,000 political prisoners currently being held in Burma by the military junta. Among them, for a time, was **Ashin Panna Siri**, a Buddhist monk who played a leading role in last year's saffron revolution. Determined not to suffer further interrogation and torture in custody, he made a daring escape from prison, and from Burma*

I was one of the leaders during the saffron revolution, the monks' uprising, and the Burmese military regime were looking for me. The authorities raided monasteries in Rangoon and the top leaders of the monks were dragged away and arrested. Those who escaped were declared wanted men. I escaped and moved from one place to another.

First I went to Mandalay and then to Sagaing and finally to Monywa, where I was arrested. I was found at an internet cafe by secret service agents. I think the cafe owner had called them. After that I was taken to Monywa No.1 Police Station.

At the police station I was badly tortured. The police used every means they had. I had to stay at this interrogation centre for six days, interrogated day and night and deprived of sleep. I was forced to squat and stand on one foot while answering questions. When I couldn't answer, or if my answer was unsatisfactory, I was punched in the head, face and ribs. My interrogators stamped on my toes with their boots and every question was accompanied by a kick to my chest. I suffered so much that I tried to commit suicide.

During my detention high-level military officials – I believe they were the divisional commander and deputy commander – visited quite often and closely supervised my questioning. They would talk to my interrogators in front of me, asking questions like: "What is the situation now? What information did we get?" and telling them to make me talk by any means.

The military security agent was the worst. He kicked my face with his boots and also kicked my chest. He said that he didn't care if he was dismissed for using violent methods. He also put his pistol on the table and threatened me.

After six days I was taken to a forced labour camp. Then one night, at midnight, as I was again undergoing violent interrogation, it became clear to me that my fate was to be sentenced to further imprisonment. So I made up my mind that I would escape.

No one helped me. I secretly planned my escape, all by myself. It was my dream, my hope. It proved to me that my mind was free even though I was sitting in jail. It showed me that while they can arrest the body they can't arrest the mind.

The following night I scaled two of the barbed-wire fences that surrounded the camp – one of them was 3m high and the other 4.5m. I climbed over them both. My hands and arms were torn and lacerated by

the barbed wire. It was very painful but I didn't care about that. I travelled alone in the jungle, hoping that I was going in the right direction – I was unsure of where the roads led.

I'm a bit afraid of wild animals, but tried not to think about them as I trekked up mountains and down the deep valleys without sleep. I came across a herd of buffalo and donkeys on my way. When they saw me they ran here and there, but they didn't harm me at all. Sometimes big thorny bushes would get in my way and I would have to roll my body over them or crawl underneath them.

While I was running I recited Buddhist scriptures – the Pritta Suttas and the Patthana. I also contemplated the Nine Supreme Qualities of Buddha and the Metta Bhavana, which is the cultivation of loving kindness. Later, I could not recite them anymore; I was too thirsty, hungry and exhausted. So I only contemplated them in my mind.

During the trip, I tried to avoid people, afraid of being arrested again and punished further. The only thing I had with me was a gas lighter that I could use in the darkness. I ate wild berries and drank what water I could find. Then, after two days and two nights in the jungle I reached the Indian border.

I have no words to express how happy I am to be once again at liberty. This freedom is not only mine but also that of all the other people of Burma. I want to contact my friends and other Burmese monks around the world – as well as those who are still in Burma. I will continue to struggle for freedom and justice. I will give the light to the poor.

• Ashin Panna Siri was interviewed by Armstrong Augusto Vaz. A protest in response to the suppression of the Burmese monks is being staged in central London on Friday October 24, between 10am and 5pm. For more information call (0044) 207 443 9700 or email the art collective Bondage for Freedom at theextortionist@bondageforfreedom.com.

66,000 civilians displaced in eastern Burma

Mizzima - Thursday, 23 October 2008 16:55

by Mungpi - Chiang Mai - At least 66,000 civilians have been forcibly evicted from their homes in eastern Burma in the past year because of increasing military activity and systematic rights abuses, including the forced relocation of villagers by the Burmese army, says an aid group assisting displaced people.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), an alliance of eleven non-governmental organizations that supports thousands of refugees from Burma along the border with Thailand, in a new report says an expanding military campaign launched by the Burmese army against ethnic minorities has forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

"Civilians flee their homes as villages are being forcibly relocated as part of the junta's counter insurgency campaign, and civilians are subject to forced labor, extortion and several times have had their houses torched," said Duncan McCarthy, relief coordinator of the TBBC.

McCarthy said that while a few displaced people have arrived in refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border, a majority of them remain in Burma as internally displaced persons, waiting for an opportunity to return to their homes.

"Approximately 66,000 people were forced to leave their homes due to the effects of armed conflict and human rights abuses during the past year alone," according to TBBC in a press statement released on Wednesday, referring to the time period between July 2007 and June 2008.

The group contends the military junta is targeting civilians in their military operation and accuses it of committing crimes against humanity.

The Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), a group collecting data on displaced people in Karen state, has voiced a similar assessment, saying Burmese soldiers are targeting civilians in their military campaign.

"The junta's army would come into the villages and torch down houses, and ridiculously place landmines on roads used by civilians. This proves that the soldiers are targeting civilians," Black Town, a member of the CIDKP, told Mizzima.

He added that in Karen state alone at least 20,000 civilians have been displaced in the past year, bringing the combined total of displaced persons in all of eastern Burma to more than 100,000.

TBBC, a group that provides shelter and food to over 140,000 Burmese refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Burma border, says the prospect of increasing numbers of displaced persons for the coming year is high, as hostility between armed ethnic rebels and the Burmese army has not abated.

"Every year there are more people being displaced, and if conditions such as military hostility between the junta armies and ethnic armed groups do not subside, we can predict that there will be even more displaced persons," said Black Town, supplementing the TBBC's concern.

Meanwhile, the Karen National Union (KNU), which is waging an armed struggle against the junta and operates along the Thai-Burmese border, confirmed there have been small skirmishes between them and the Burmese army throughout the past year, severely affecting civilians living in the region.

Pado David Thaw, a central committee member of the KNU further added, "Throughout the past year there have been skirmishes between us and the junta's army, who have been trying to take over areas under KNU control."

He said these conflicts adversely affect villagers and force thousands to be displaced.

TBBC Executive Director Jack Dunford argues that with the junta targeting civilians, it is the responsibility of the international community to protect civilians. And as the causes to this crisis are political, the international community should renew diplomatic efforts to broker a tripartite dialogue and promote national reconciliation.

Demanding an immediate nationwide ceasefire, Dunford cautions that justice cannot be ignored either, stating, "Yet it remains essential to hold the junta to account for atrocities committed in eastern Burma."

[Myanmar appeals for more donations for schools in cyclone-hit region](#)

Xinhua – 23 October 2008

YANGON -- The Myanmar education authorities have appealed for more donations to rebuild remaining basic education schools in the cyclone-hard-hit Ayeyawaddy delta region, saying that 849 such schools are still in need of fund for the move.

According to the Department of Basic Education-1 under the Ministry of Education Thursday, out of a total of 1,785 primary, middle and high schools destroyed in the cyclone that hit the region early last May, 694 have been or are being repaired, leaving 1,091 schools yet to be done for reopening.

Of the 1,091 schools, 242 have been set for repair with the use of a special supplementary state fund allotted for the present fiscal year and funds donated by private donors and foreign organizations in view of the pressing need for continued pursuit of education by children in the disaster-ravaged region, the sources said.

The Ayeyawaddy delta region comprises seven townships namely, Ngaputaw, Mawlamyinegyun, Laputta, Phyapon, Kyaiklat, Dedaye and Bogalay.

Meanwhile, Myanmar has targeted to build up to 60,000 low-cost houses for homeless cyclone victims in Ayeyawaddy and Yangon divisions hit by the storm.

The low-cost housing projects have been implemented by 69 private companies since June under the country's rehabilitation program and so far, 7,539 of such houses have been donated by the government and well-wishers, according to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

During the storm, more than 370,000 houses in the seven townships in Ayeyawaddy division and 40 townships in Yangon division were destroyed, the sources disclosed.

In the latest development, some storm-hard-hit areas in Myanmar's Ayeyawaddy division including Dedaye and Laputta are in quick recovery with most of the ravaged houses being already rebuilt, according to recent official media report.

Deadly cyclone Nargis, which occurred over the Bay of Bengal, hit five divisions and states -- Ayeyawaddy, Yangon, Bago, Mon and Kayin on last May 2 and 3, of which Ayeyawaddy and Yangon inflicted the heaviest casualties and massive infrastructure damage.

The storm has killed 84,537 people and left 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured, according to official death toll.

Burmese Rice Begins to Enter Bangladesh

Narinjara - 10/24/2008

by Khaing Pray Htun - Large scale exports of Burmese rice have been entering Bangladesh via the Teknaf border point for the past few days with the volume of rice expected to continue increasing by the day.

A port authority official reported that so far 7,124 tons of rice from Burma have been exported to Bangladesh through the Teknaf border point this October.

In July, 885 metric tons of rice were exported, and 3,467 metric tons were exported in August. In September, 6,065 metric tons of rice was exported to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh rice traders expect more rice will come to Bangladesh in the near future because Burma agreed to export 100,000 tons of rice to the neighboring country.

General Maung Aye agreed to the export amount during his visit to Bangladesh from 7 to 9 October.

According to a local source, Burmese people are concerned about food scarcity in the next rainy season because the production of rice is expected to decline during the paddy season after the main rice producing region in Burma was struck by Cyclone Nargis. #

NLD Secretary U Lwin Suffers Stroke, Chairman Aung Shwe also Ill

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 22, 2008

By WAI MOE - One of the secretaries of Burma's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), U Lwin, has suffered a stroke, NLD spokesman Nyan Win said on Wednesday.

The 86-year-old party functionary is critically ill, according to NLD sources.

NLD Chairman Aung Shwe, 91, is also ill, suffering from flu, Nyan Win told The Irrawaddy.

The NLD sources said U Lwin is not expected to return to work.

He and Aung Shwe are said to be the world's oldest active political party leaders.

They served as high-ranking military officers under Gen Ne Win, then chief of the Tatmadaw (Burma's armed forces). Before the 1962 military coup, Aung Shwe was a member of the Burma Socialist Party.

Aung Shwe was forced to retire from the Tatmadaw in 1961, when he was the commander of the Southern Regional Command. He then served as Burma's ambassador to Australia, Egypt, France, Spain and New Zealand from 1961 to 1975.

U Lwin was deputy prime minister and a state council member under the Burma Socialist Programme Party regime, headed by Gen Ne Win.

Both of them became leading members of the NLD and the Patriotic Old Comrades League (POCL) in 1988. The POCL was abolished by the current military junta.

Aung Shwe became chairman of the NLD when the junta pressured the party to sack Tin Oo and his secretary-general, Aung San Suu Kyi, in the early 1990s. Aung Shwe is also chairman of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament, a grouping of successful candidates who won constituencies in the 1990 election.

U Lwin and Aung Shwe were members of a faction of former military officers when the NLD was formed. A second faction grouped intellectuals and was led by Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Tin.

Win Tin was among many members of the intellectual faction imprisoned in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He was released in late September, along with such leading NLD members as Khin Maung Shwe, Than Nyein and May Win Myint, and he was offered his former position of secretary. An executive member role was offered to Khin Maung Shwe.

Win Tin, a popular figure within the NLD, has yet to accept the position of secretary, but he has agreed to work as an executive member, sources said.

Khin Maung Shwe said the old factions within the NLD had ceased to exist. "We have neither factions of patriotic old comrades or intellectuals. We are all [members] of the NLD," he said.

Most of the "old guard" members of the NLD's Central Executive Committee (CEC) are in their 80s.

There has been no reorganization of the CEC for several years, partly because any reform of the party has to be approved by the government, according to Aye Thar Aung, an Arakan leader who works closely with the NLD.

The party has, however, gradually rejuvenated its information committee. Members such as Han Thar Myint, Nyan Win, Win Naing and the late Myint Thein, all of them in their 50s and 60s, became spokesmen for the NLD. Before their arrival on the scene, U Lwin was the NLD's only spokesman.

Before Suu Kyi was arrested in May 2003, she regularly held literary gatherings with young people at the NLD headquarter in Rangoon, fostering a future generation of leaders.

The NLD also reportedly encouraged young members to attend classes in the English language and international relations at the education centers of foreign embassies in Rangoon, with the same aim of building a new leadership generation.

"To be dynamic in politics, the NLD needs a new generation," said Aye Thar Aung.

[Burma: Asian and European Leaders Should Press for Reforms](#)

Human Rights Watch - 22 Oct 2008 23:46:35 GMT

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(New York, October 23, 2008) Asian and European governments meeting in China this week should press Burma to improve its human rights record, Human Rights Watch said today. The seventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit is being held in Beijing on October 24-25, 2008, with leaders from 45 countries scheduled to attend, including Prime Minister Thein Sein of Burma. ASEM promotes cooperative efforts by Europe and Asia to meet global challenges.

"ASEM members have a chance to challenge Burma to make political reforms and start respecting basic freedoms," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Silence over the human rights abuses in today's Burma isn't an option anymore for ASEM leaders."

Human Rights Watch said the ASEM meeting is an important opportunity to exert crucially needed pressure on the Burmese military government following the breakdown of United Nations efforts at mediation.

Ibrahim Gambari, the UN secretary-general's special adviser on Myanmar, failed to gain any concessions during two visits to Burma in 2008, though the Security Council has called for "tangible progress" in Burma on political reforms. Senior Burmese leaders refused to meet with Gambari in August, and Burmese officials contended that he was meddling in the country's domestic affairs.

A constitutional referendum in Burma held in May delayed urgent humanitarian relief after Cyclone Nargis. The military government claims that over 98 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote and that 92 percent of them endorsed a constitution that cements military rule.

Human Rights Watch has reported on the human rights problems surrounding the [referendum](#), including tight restrictions on freedom of assembly, association, and on the media. Now that the referendum has been completed, the military government says it will hold elections in 2010.

"Since Burma's rulers have stonewalled on the efforts by the UN to bring about real change, it's up to ASEM ministers to send a message that sham political reforms are unacceptable," Adams said.

As part of the European Union's sanctions against Burma, no senior official from the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) is permitted to enter Europe or to attend multilateral meetings in Europe unless a "political dialogue is conducted that directly promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Burma/Myanmar."

Under these conditions, the European Union invited Nyan Win, Burma's foreign minister, to last year's ASEM meeting in Hamburg. But EU efforts to raise human rights issues during the meeting, as well as through other private consultations with Nyan Win, failed to produce any human rights improvements for Burma's population.

Human Rights Watch urged the European Union to put pressure on Burma's main supporters in ASEM: China, the host of the summit, India, Singapore, and other ASEAN states. China and India in particular have forged close relations with the SPDC. Both countries are major arms suppliers to and significant investors in Burma, and have vied for the rights to import natural gas from Burma.

"The EU has tried to press Burma at past ASEM meetings, but as long as other key Asian countries fail to pick up the torch, improvements are highly unlikely," said Adams. "It's the collective responsibility of ASEM members not to sacrifice the rights of the Burmese people because of potentially lucrative business and energy deals."

Human Rights Watch called on Asian and European leaders attending the ASEM meeting to push the SPDC to:

- *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 freedom of expression, assembly, and association; Cease military attacks against ethnic minority populations, and hold accountable all members of the security forces responsible for war crimes; and*
- *End the recruitment of children under the age of 18 for the armed forces, and demobilize children under 18 who are already serving.*

[Aid Groups Say Burma Continues Rights Abuses in Eastern States](#)

VOA - 22 October 2008

By Ron Corben - Bangkok

A new report says an increased troop presence in eastern Burma has led to tens of thousands of people being displaced because of human rights abuses. Ron Corben reports from Bangkok.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium says rights abuses by Burma's military along the eastern border with Thailand are growing worse. The group says Burma refuses to give aid groups access to the region.

The Bangkok consortium is an alliance of 11 aid and advocacy organizations from nine countries that provide aid to displaced Burmese, particularly along the border with Thailand.

The report says in the past year more than 66,000 people were forced out of their homes in northern Karen state, where the government is fighting insurgents from ethnic minority groups.

A consortium director, Sally Thompson, says the humanitarian situation in the area has worsened.

"We have to say it is an ongoing deterioration in Burma and what the report highlights is that the violations of humanitarian and human rights law in the conflict areas of eastern Burma as systematic as ever and ongoing," said Thompson.

Aid groups estimate there are more than half a million people displaced within Burma, most of them in Karen and Shan States.

Tens of thousands others live in refugee camps in Thailand, while thousands more work illegally around Southeast Asia.

The report says that increased economic activity and development in eastern Burma has meant the government has sent more troops there. That makes things worse for area residents.

The report says people are forced to work on development projects and to build army bases. Thompson says many are detained and abused.

"If people are suspected of a relationship with the resistance movement, with the insurgents, they are often brought in for questioning, they are interrogated, they are detained," added Thompson. "And if they are suspected of having a relationship it can go as far as torture leading to death in detention."

The release of the report comes as the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who is expected to visit Burma in December, this week expressed frustration over the lack of progress on political reforms.

Ban has warned he will cancel the trip unless he is confident it will achieve tangible results on reforms.

Burma's military government, in power since 1962, crushed protests led by Buddhist monks in September last year. At least 30 people died in the crackdown and hundreds were arrested.

Most Western governments have imposed economic sanctions on Burma, to push the government to ease political repression. But its neighbors, including India and China, continue to do business in Burma, where the government largely controls the economy.

[Burmese increasingly forced to seek greener pastures abroad](#)

Mizzima News - Wednesday, 22 October 2008 17:00

Chiang Mai - The outflow of Burma's workforce to regional countries is expected to increase over the coming years, adding to the three million Burmese who are already estimated to have left in recent decades, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Despite a dearth of reliable data for statistics related to migration patterns in Southeast Asia, the IOM, in a report released Monday, stated that economic hardship will continue to "push" Burmese citizens to seek a better livelihood across international borders.

"The country's current lack of adequate infrastructure and its low skilled workforce are a hindrance to further economic development," explain the reports' authors. "Limited employment prospects in Myanmar [Burma] encourage many to look for opportunities in other countries."

The only out-migration country in the regional study where economic growth is expected to be slower in the coming years than in destination countries, "Push factors" are expected to remain particularly strong in Myanmar [Burma], where slower growth is expected to widen further the income disparity with Thailand."

Thailand, with a per capita income six times greater than that of Burma, remains the principle destination of those leaving Burma. However, in contrast to earlier trends, IOM estimates prospective migrant workers now vastly outpace asylum seekers, while the migration of Burmese women across borders may now be higher than that of men. Official statistics show 46 percent of Burmese migrants to the Royal Kingdom are now female.

Regionally said to represent one the largest migrant populations, Burmese in Thailand are estimated to number some two million, a majority of whom lack any formal authorization, being forced to exist with either irregular or no status.

IOM warns that the lack of official recognition and rights extended to migrant populations exposes members of the migrant community to abuse and exploitation, creating a living environment fraught with dangers such as an increased rate of exposure to infectious diseases.

Further, due to the incomplete implementation of a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding between Thai and Burmese authorities, migrants are said to commonly be go without basic societal services, including insufficient health care and educational opportunities.

Of the estimated two million Burmese in Thailand, 485,925 had work permits as of mid-2007 – accounting for a staggering 91 percent of all work permit applications received by the host country; with most migrants listed as being employed in fishery processing, agribusiness, construction and in private households.

In additional testimony to the perceived lack of future economic opportunities in Burma, applications for 77,000 Burmese children have now been completed as per the requirements of the initial stage of the 2004 migrant application process for children in Thailand.

Statistics cited from the Asian Migrant Centre estimate Burma's migrant population in selected countries throughout the region to be: Malaysia – 25,000; Bangladesh – 290,000; India – 70,000.

If the risks to which migrant workers are exposed are to be minimized, IOM recommends improved oversight of the recruitment industry, as well as full implementation of bilateral agreements ensuring the rights of immigrant populations, making certain to address gender sensitive issues.

Migrant Burmese, residing regionally, are listed during the course of 2006 as having sent 117 million dollars in remittances to family and friends remaining behind in Burma.

Meanwhile, official remittances from migrants throughout the region are said to have risen from 4.2 billion dollars in 1990 to 50 billion dollars as of 2006.

COMMENT: [Myanmar's failed non-violent opposition](#)

Asia Times Online - 23 October 2008

By Norman Robespierre

YANGON - The one-year anniversary of Myanmar's military crackdown on non-violent protests in Yangon and several other cities calling for political change came and went without incident.

While the Buddhist monk-led demonstrations briefly raised global awareness of the Burmese people's plight, it also highlighted the failure of the opposition's long-held non-violence strategy as the best means to bring change to the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime that views the failure to use violence as a sign of weakness.

While outwardly a spontaneous gesture in reaction to economic woes, the demonstrations were the culmination of years of planning by opposition forces inside and abroad for non-violent action to confront the regime. Opposition to the ruling regime is figuratively headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of General Aung San, the founding father of Burmese independence. Her commitment to non-violent struggle for political change has earned her the Nobel Peace Prize and global admiration, but two decades since soldiers opened fire on unarmed pro-democracy demonstrators, there is little else to show for her two decades of non-violent struggle.

The resounding victory of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party in the 1990 elections was the political high-water mark for the opposition. While the regime refused to honor the poll's results, the election provided political legitimacy to the NLD and a handful of opposition activists. Many of those elected still cling to demands that the election's results be honored, but with each passing year those claims to legitimacy become less germane. Close to 40% of the elected members of parliament have been dismissed or resigned and a full 20% have died.

The opposition defined broadly is comprised of a plethora of political organizations. Among the best known are the National Coalition Government for the Union of Burma, headed by Dr Sein Win, Suu Kyi's

cousin, the All-Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF), Democratic Alliance for Burma, National League for Democracy-(Liberated Areas).

Additionally, there are several umbrella organizations such as the democratic Alliance for Burma (DAB) and the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), which count membership from various political groups and ethnic insurgent armies. These organizations receive substantial backing from Western organizations, such as the Open Society Institute and National Endowment for Democracy.

The vast majority of the opposition follows Suu Kyi's guidance that political change can and should be achieved through non-violence. That doctrine was further promulgated by the Albert Einstein Institute of Geneva and New York. In 1994, it sponsored a consultation on political defiance for Burmese democracy leaders. Included in the audience were representatives of ABSDF, NLD-LA, DAB, and the NCGUB, represented by Dr Sein Win. A key speaker at the pivotal event was the institute's founder, Gene Sharp.

Sharp's involvement with the Burmese opposition was specifically mentioned in a June 1997 press conference condemning foreign support to terrorists by then Secretary-1 of the SPDC, Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt. In hindsight, rather than condemnation, Khin Nyunt should have heaped laurels on Sharp for promoting non-violence.

The opposition's adherence to non-violence has given the regime a monopoly on fear that allowed it to solidify its position, condemning generations of Burmese to life (and in some cases, death) under the military regime. Additionally, limiting the prospect of violent consequences removed one aspect which may have motivated the regime to negotiate change.

Further, the promotion of non-violence undermined the united opposition against the regime. Under the tutelage of Khin Nyunt, the regime succeeded in enticing numerous armed ethnic opposition groups to surrender their arms and "enter the light" - or at least accept a ceasefire. Khin Nyunt used a variety of incentives to the groups and particularly their leaders to gain their cooperation. The elevated principle of non-violence made it easier for group leaders to accept the bribery.

The success of the regime's effort to pursue ceasefire deals continues to haunt the opposition with fragmentation and conflicting interests. Ethnic armies whose cooperation could have tilted the "Saffron" revolution to effect real change, sat and watched, perhaps out of concern that armed rebellion would jeopardize their lucrative mining or other concessions. As a result, the regime was able to focus its military might on the unarmed protesters and monks.

Incentives and self-interest affect not only limited ceasefires and peace groups, but also some ethnic armies that continue to put forces in the field against the Myanmar military, or Tatmadaw. According to a senior Thai military officer, the SPDC is able to continue to benefit from the vulnerable Yadana-Yetagun gas pipelines because the Mon insurgents in the area are receiving payoffs from both the regime and the Thai authorities. Construction of a third foreign exchange earning pipeline in the same area is reportedly slated for this dry season.

A valuable experience

The Einstein Institute's website comments that while the non-violent struggles in Myanmar, China and Tibet "have not brought an end to the ruling dictatorships or occupations, they have exposed the brutal nature of those repressive regimes to the world community and have provided the populations with valuable experience with this form of struggle".

How 20 years of mostly ineffectual resistance can be summed up as a "valuable experience" is a mystery. One wonders to what valuable experience those sitting comfortably in their ideological ivory towers refer: languishing in a Myanmar prison, being knocked senseless by a police truncheon, having family members disappear, torture, death? How much longer before the Burmese people realize the opposition's strategy of non-violence is ineffective against those who have the means and determination to kill to maintain control and decide to pursue a different, more assertive course?

Opposition optimists say that the regime was weakened by last year's crackdown, arguing that the violence police and soldiers perpetrated against Buddhist monks irked the populace and many military officers, the majority of them Buddhist. Further, they cite perennial rumors of infighting among the

generals and lower ranks that could lead to fractures in the leadership and eventually a democracy-promoting mutiny.

However, earlier leadership struggles in which top generals fell from grace - including Tun Kyi, Saw Maung, Ne Win and Khin Nyunt - only brought changes in military personalities, not a transformation of the military-dominated system. Indeed, the system is highly resilient and endures with a new crop of military officers entering the top ranks of the Tatmadaw each year. Although many of the officers are not enthusiastic that monks were beaten, most believe that the majority of the protesters were recent novices who had donned monk's robes expressly to carry out illegal political demonstrations.

The optimists also claim that the regime's inadequate response to Cyclone Nargis, which killed over 80,000 people and adversely affected the livelihoods of over 2 million, also weakened the SPDC. As evidence, they mention that many military personnel and government workers had relatives in the worst-hit Ayeyawady Division and were upset at the delayed response. The actual intensity of disenchantment caused by the slow reaction to the killer storm, of course, is hard to quantify without public opinion polls.

However, the fact that Burmese people are used to being self-sufficient and not in the habit of relying on the government for anything likely means the fallout from such a callous official response was less severe than it would have been in other countries. Whatever disenchantment the government's limp response to Nargis and the September 2007 crackdown may have sown, to date it has not been exploited to cause the Tatmadaw to split or the military government to fall.

From another perspective, it could just as easily be argued that Cyclone Nargis made the regime stronger by opening up a new tap of foreign aid. Millions of dollars of humanitarian aid poured into the economy as foreign nations rallied to assist the storm's survivors. The regime's multi-tiered foreign exchange system allowed them to extract an estimated 20% to 25% from all foreign exchange certificates converted into the local kyat currency.

The diversion of United Nations (UN) funds alone resulted in at least US\$1.5 million (some estimates are as high as \$10 million) of humanitarian aid being delivered straight into the regime's coffers. The tilted exchange system also affected non-UN aid agencies for an undetermined amount of donations. Hard currency intended to relieve the suffering of cyclone survivors instead directly benefited the regime.

Nargis also brought a recent call from the International Crisis Group (ICG) to repeal sanctions and provide more aid than beyond what is necessary to recover from Nargis to develop the impoverished country. While few share the ICG's sentiment, which in the past was criticized by the Open Society Institute for its unscholarly approach with respect to Myanmar, its call would allow the regime to reap even more foreign money to consolidate its position.

Nargis brought not only financial benefit, but also is believed to have increased the regime's confidence. Certainly, the regime's confidence soared when French and US warships withdrew from waters off Myanmar's coast in the aftermath of the killer storm. While the vessels were sent to deliver humanitarian aid, antagonistic rhetoric about the humanitarian "right to protect" Myanmar's citizens by Western diplomats preceded the vessels' arrivals, raising the regime's suspicions about their mission.

Rather than appear to submit to Western threats, and fearful of a possible uprising by opposition activists should foreign forces land on Myanmar soil, the regime barred the aid from being delivered by other than their own naval personnel. Eventually the vessels withdrew without a shot being fired and much of the aid went undelivered. The regime's ability to diplomatically ward off the perceived threat posed by French and American warships is believed to have boosted the regime's confidence in its ability to stand up to neo-colonialist adversaries.

Confidence in the regime's decision-making, often portrayed as daft or worse in the international media, has recently reportedly grown among the rank and file. In particular, the decision to move the political capital to Naypyitaw from Yangon is - after the cyclone which hit the old capital - viewed in a favorable new light. Prior to Nargis, the abrupt move in late 2005 was widely criticized for its exorbitant expense and ridiculed for its reliance on astrology. It is now looked at by many Burmese as cosmic confirmation of the wisdom and even prescience of the senior leadership - or at least that of their astrologers.

More important is the regime's growing confidence in the reliability of government forces to deploy as instruments of control. The ability to successfully extinguish the pro-democracy protests in September

2007, without notable dissension within the ranks of the police and military, left the Tatmadaw stronger and the regime more self-assured. According to several foreign diplomats based in Yangon, the regime is now reportedly more confident in the loyalty of its forces and its ability to control unrest.

On the other hand, the position of the political opposition is decidedly weaker. More opposition members are in prison than before, while countless others have fled the country due to very real concerns for their personal security. An untold number have perished. Despite the overwhelming support of the populace, the opposition was unable to capitalize on social discontent in 2007, when the junta removed fuel price subsidies and fuel costs shot up 500% overnight. Nor have they been able to leverage the chaos and suffering brought on by the junta's inept handling of the cyclone disaster this year into a renewed call for political change.

Instead of maintaining offensive pressure and preparing adequate defensive measures to protect their supporters, they have blindly clung to the gospel of non-violence in the hope that international pressure would eventually lead to democratic change. As many Saffron Revolution demonstrators can attest, hope is a weak defensive shield against a police baton, a charging truck, or the ammunition of soldiers trained to kill.

Asymmetric violence

While pursuing a moral high ground of non-violence, the opposition has ceded the battlefield to its military enemy. Unlike themselves, the ruling SPDC junta is more than willing to use violence to achieve its goals. One means at the regime's disposal are *Swan-ar-Shin* thugs, whose actions undoubtedly are directed by elements of the military regime, most likely the *Sa Ya Pha*, or military intelligence. *Swan-ar-Shin* often intimidate and cower the populace with the threat of violence and physical assault and many were captured on film beating unarmed demonstrators after they had been arrested.

The regime's asymmetric use of violence breeds fear in the populace, forcefully enabling the regime to squash even the faintest hint of opposition to its rule. Viewed through that lens, the *Swan-ar-Shin* has been an unqualified success for the regime and instrumental in its staying power. Their ability to use violence with impunity and intimidate those holding dissenting political views has muzzled open expression of support for political change.

As the Einstein Institute's Sharp points out in his writings, it is the fear of violent sanctions, rather than the violence itself, that creates the climate of fear which causes the populace to yield. In the absence of a functioning legal system, the opposition would be wise to pursue extra-legal action against the regime's violent henchmen. For instance, makeshift justice squads of the people could be formed to mete out street punishment to the *Swan-ar-Shin* members known to be guilty of the most heinous abuses.

These *Swan-ar-Shin* agents are well known to their neighbors and a few instances of vigilante justice would no doubt cause others to consider the consequences of their unjust actions and embolden those who oppose them. While opposition-led vigilante squads may not totally remove the climate of fear, at least fear would be more equally distributed to both sides of the political aisle.

In February, the Democratic Voice of Burma reported on a rare example of focused direct action against the junta's henchmen. According to the report, a regime-linked United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) member from Hlaing Tharyar township with a local reputation for abuse was found beheaded. The circumstances of his death caused other USDA members to fear a similar fate and their harassment of people noticeably reduced, according to the report. Were this fear of retribution more widespread, the regime would have fewer resources to strangle dissent and added incentive to negotiate with the opposition.

Instead, the exiled opposition blindly adheres to non-violence and is now mounting a major effort to petition the UN to revoke Myanmar's diplomatic credentials. There is nothing original in petitioning the UN: a similar initiative met with no success in 1996 and there is no reason to think the current initiative has any better chance of succeeding. Numerous other countries in the UN General Assembly are also far from being democracies and they would be reluctant to support such punitive measures out of fear that some day a similar procedure might be launched against them.

China and Russia certainly are no proponents of democracy and without their support inside the UN Security Council the latest effort will also fail. Even were the effort successfully staged and Myanmar lost

its seat at the UN, the domestic impact on the regime would be marginal. While the UN initiative helps maintain global awareness, the opposition's international efforts might be better deployed in targeting the regime's primary enabler, Singapore, which is particularly vulnerable because of its global commercial interests, including the recent stakes it took in big Western banks.

Singapore has successfully deflected criticism for its role by pointing the finger at China or other neighboring countries as principal supporters of the regime. But it is Singaporean support that is the regime's lifeblood. Many of the regime's leaders and their family members are known to have Singaporean bank accounts. The regime's tyrants frequently travel to Singapore for state-of-the-art medical treatment and receive cordial official welcomes. Burmese democracy activists in Singapore, on the other hand, risk arrest or revocation of their visas should they protest their regular arrivals.

Singapore also allows numerous Myanmar businesses with direct links to the regime to incorporate in Singapore. Singapore's willingness to sacrifice ethics for money gives the Myanmar regime a cloak of international legitimacy to do business and enables it in many cases to circumvent financial sanctions imposed by Western countries. One example of Myanmar's Singaporean commercial fronts is Silver Wave Energy, reported in the media as a Singaporean company that brokered oil and gas deals between the regime and Indian and Russian companies. However, research into the firm indicates its phone numbers and offices are in Yangon at the Trader's Hotel.

Meanwhile, the expatriate opposition leadership continues to be led by the same inept strategists that espouse non-violence as the sole implement to effect political change in Myanmar. Nearly two decades have passed without a democratic election and the opposition's leadership has grown stale, devoid of new ideas and lacking a coherent strategy. Indeed, they continue down the path of failed tactics that has degraded the opposition into its present sad, ineffectual state.

Perhaps the opposition finds itself in this position because it relies so heavily on Western financial aid, which is explicitly tied to non-violent action. Accepting such financial aid should not preclude coordinating a unified offense that complements non-violent action, nor should it divert resources from potentially successful operations targeting the regime and its enablers with violent and non-violent methods to those historically proven to be without merit.

Expatriate opposition leaders are known to travel in business class on democracy grants and other donations recycling old ideas that simply don't work in Myanmar's military-run context. They are neither up for re-election, nor beholden to an electorate - apart from their Western government patrons. Many, it seems through conversations, expect to retain their exile status and cushy positions for life. They suffer no adverse consequences for their failed policies, although those actually inside Myanmar often bear a heavy burden for their bravado.

Opposition leaders inside the country, including Suu Kyi, have likewise failed on numerous fronts. They failed to capitalize on the regime's temporary weaknesses in 2004 when it disbanded its military intelligence network amid an intra-junta power struggle. They failed to coordinate offensive actions of the various ethnic armies to support the broader movement for political change. Meanwhile, the opposition as a whole continues to fail to adequately target Singapore, China and other key international enablers of the regime. In sum, they have failed to seize the initiative. And they still fail to realize that they will fail again if they use the same tactics under the same conditions.

Brothers in arms

Perhaps the opposition's biggest failure has been its lack of a concerted effort to split the armed forces. This should be their most critical strategic objective if they are ever to liberate their country from the SPDC's oppressive rule. Although the Tatmadaw itself generally follows collective responsibility and duty, outsiders placing collective guilt upon all members of the army serves to unite the armed forces rather than divide them.

As an example, an opposition supporter authored a list entitled "Enemies of the Revolution" that anonymously circulated on the Internet. The list, while notable for its implicit threat of violence, was unfocused and included the director of medical services for the military. Presumably, he was placed on the list for the crime of wearing a uniform. However, the simplistic, carte blanche approach of painting the

entire Myanmar military as evil is self-defeating and undermines the strategy needed to weaken the strongest pillar of the regime.

Unfortunately, this has been the general approach used by the opposition as well as many Western diplomats. The opposition needs at least some military officers to support them in order to fracture the regime's main power base. Despite this, rarely will an opposition leader talk of any positive accomplishments of the armed forces. Rather the military is universally equated with the regime rather than being seen for what it is: an implement of national power, as necessary for the opposition should it assume control as it is for the current regime.

Opposition leaders would be well advised to cultivate junior military officers by openly recognizing the national importance of the military and outlining how military service and the abysmal conditions soldiers currently endure would be better under a more democratic government. Last year's crackdown clearly demonstrates the opposition has failed to undermine government forces' reliability to impose violent sanctions on behalf of the regime.

The opposition has had two decades to infiltrate the military with those who would willingly carry the banner of democracy to leapfrog their own promotions. It has had 20 years to tempt military officers to abandon the carrot of self-interest that supporting the military government holds for them. The opposition should have sought to reassure the army and police that they would have a key role in any new government and that a system of compensation and benefits will be maintained and in places improved. It has made little headway in that direction and there is scant evidence to suggest they even really endeavored to do so. Had they swayed even a faction of military or police officials that political change offered a better future for them and their families, last September's "Saffron" revolution could have had a decidedly different finale.

The failures of the past two decades may in large part be attributed to the movement binding itself too tightly to Suu Kyi's personality cult and the philosophy of non-violence. Her reported intolerance of any type of violent dissent and willingness to dismiss members who seek alternate solutions to problems may be why the NLD and other opposition groups have failed to groom a new generation of leadership. In any case, the "Saffron" revolution may have succeeded where Suu Kyi has failed. A number of her supporters now recognize that non-violent dissent alone will not change the status quo and her increasing marginalization from years of house arrest may yet serve as impetus for more confrontational tactics.

Violence alone, of course, is not a solution. But tougher tactics coupled with constructive engagement or inducements for the regime to change its behavior would mark a welcome departure from the current dogmatic adherence to non-violence. The opposition now suffers from 20 years of pushing for change without a logical and realistic strategy.

To be sure, its leadership has suffered immensely from arrests and crackdowns. But unless the opposition soon infuses a dose of realism into its strategic mix and uses all available tactics at its disposal, including efforts to undermine support within the military for the SPDC leadership, its efforts are unlikely to result in democratic political change. Meanwhile, the next generation of emboldened soldiers will come of age and take up positions of power in defense of the oppressive status quo.

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[Make Burma 'ungovernable'](#)

Mizzima - Wednesday, 22 October 2008 17:17

by Salai Za Ceu Lian

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

The fact that the regime is hell-bent on its own roadmap is clearly indicative of the considerable weakness of the democratic opposition of Burma as a whole. For the last 18 years, since Burma's 1990 general election, the military junta has shown no real sign of flexibility and willingness to find a negotiated settlement to the country's long crisis concerning the democratic opposition. As long as the junta sees no

potential threat to their power from the opposition, no one should be under any illusion that the military regime will actually hand over power or make a concerted effort to compromise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When this lesson is applied to Burma, no one would dispute the fact that Burmese citizens from all walks of life have done their part to protest repressive military rule. Yes, thousands of peaceful demonstrators have already died in cold blood. Sadly, despite all the sacrifices they have made for our country, the just cause for which they have fought has not been realized. Again and again, sporadic and occasional uprisings against the Burmese military junta have proven that genuine democratic reform is unachievable without the persistent and coordinated efforts of a nationwide people's movement.

While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains crippled in a similar way to that of Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, it is unfortunate that other main opposition leaders in Burma today cannot provide overall strategic and organizational leadership. For the last 18 years, the main opposition leaders inside Burma – including

most MPs elected in 1990 – have done nothing more effective than issuing statements. One can't help but wonder, is that what they were elected for?

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

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

[Nargis' Impact: Western aid policy toward Burma outdated: ICG](#)

Mizzima - Tuesday, 21 October 2008 16:34

by Mizzima News - A new international think tank report argues that the success of post-Nargis international aid operations demands a rethinking of Burmese aid policies by foreign governments predisposed to an approach of isolation with respect to Naypyitaw.

The International Crisis Group (ICG), in a 45-page report released on Monday, sites the documentation of successful and accountable aid operations to cyclone afflicted regions of Burma as evidence that an enhanced aid policy on the part of the broader international community could eventually be used to confront other crises in governance pervasive throughout the troubled country.

"The international community should build on the unprecedented cooperation between the Myanmar [Burma] government and humanitarian agencies following cyclone Nargis and reverse longstanding, counterproductive aid policies," according to ICG.

"Political reform remains vital but withholding aid has done nothing to promote this", adds John Virgoe of ICG. "Aid is valuable in its own right for alleviating suffering, as well as a potential means of opening up a closed country, improving governance and empowering people to take control of their own lives".

The report goes on to assess that a restrictive aid policy may have been prudent in the late 1980s, when a drastic change in leadership and national institutions appeared likely. However, ICG states that such an approach is now outdated, with the military government firmly in control and in the face of near non-existent civilian institutions.

While ICG acknowledges that the relief response of Burma's military leaders was deplorable in the first weeks after Nargis struck in early May, stating that "much of what the government actually tried to do to help the survivors was undermined by lack of communication, petty corruption and sheer incompetence," it insists that rehabilitation endeavors and relations between authorities and aid agencies, likely needed for several years to come, now function as they would in any other country.

Yet, despite criticizing the early efforts of the government, the report also points to factors on the ground and the Western-led policy of isolation against Burma and its ruling class as additional impediments to the establishment of an effective relief operation.

Postulating that two decades of stringent restrictions on aid weakened the capacity of the country to respond to the devastation wrought by Nargis, ICG claims Western government actions in the immediate days and weeks following the storm only worsened the situation.

The reports' authors single out U.S. First Lady Laura Bush's public denouncement of the junta only two days after the storm and her insistence on linking the situation to a call for democratic governance in Burma, along with the U.S., Britain and France's decision to send naval vessels to the region to conduct relief operations, as especially debilitating to any hoped for rapid reaction on the part of Burma's military government.

"Political reform," contends the international think tank, "remains vital and should continue to be the subject of high-level international diplomacy and pressure. But it is a mistake in the Myanmar [Burma] context to use aid as a bargaining chip, to be given only in return for political change."

"Aid alone will not bring sustainable human development, never mind peace and democracy," further cautions Robert Templer, ICG's Asia Program Director. "Yet, due to the limited links between Myanmar [Burma] and the outside world, aid has unusual importance as an arena of interaction among the government, society and the international community."

In the estimation of ICG, a greatly enhanced aid policy, in addition to proving a stepping stone for eventual cooperation and change in other aspects of governance, would facilitate the development of civil society in Burma, empower local communities, provide education in necessary skills and at least partially relieve the country's severe economic hardship.

Recognizing that vast reform within the aid community in Burma will require cooperation and adaptation from multiple actors, not the least of which is Burma's government, ICG recommends that Western governments refrain from imposing further punitive measures, lift political restrictions on aid and repeal sanctions that hurt vulnerable sections of Burmese society, including those directed at the garment industry, tourism and agricultural and fishery products.

Ultimately, ICG, while understanding of the reaction of many people to call for a hard line approach to the poor leadership record of Burma's ruling generals, determines that "reinforcing the regime's isolation will do little to help resolve the country's complex social, political and economic crisis."

Compared to countries in somewhat similar situations, ICG estimates that Burma receives twenty times less aid than what might otherwise be expected. And the end result, according to the reports' authors, is a policy that has effectively "weakened, not strengthened, the forces for peace and democracy."

Link to the report: [International Crisis Group - Burma/Myanmar after Nargis: Time to Normalise Aid Relations \(Report N°161\)](#) - 20 October 2008

[India wants to seal border with Myanmar after blast](#)

Reuters - Wed 22 Oct 2008, 7:03 GMT

By Biswajyoti Das - GUWAHATI, India - India needs to seal its border with Myanmar to stop separatist rebels carrying out regular attacks in the northeast, officials said on Wednesday, a day after a powerful blast killed 17 people in Manipur state.

Police said a bomb on a bicycle blew up in Imphal, the state capital, late on Tuesday. At least 40 people were wounded in the attack that police believe was revenge for security forces killing at least eight rebels last month.

Police suspect the separatist People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) in Manipur, a state which has suffered separatist and tribal insurgencies for the past 60 years in the troubled northeast region.

The rebels escaped across a largely unguarded border to their camps in neighbouring Myanmar, police said.

Manipur shares a long porous border with Myanmar of around 370 km (230 miles) and security officials want the entire stretch to be barbed-wired to stop smuggling of weapons and explosives.

Ringed by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan, India's northeast is home to more than 200 tribes and has been racked by separatist revolts since India gained independence from Britain in 1947.

"We want the centre (federal government) to fence the border, we cannot let them (PREPAK) escape after the incident," Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh told Reuters on Wednesday.

The rebel group wants to throw non-Manipuris out of the state and demands statehood, which India says is not possible.

About 700 armed PREPAK rebels have carried out regular attacks in the state, including firing a shell at the chief minister's fortified home last month.

"It definitely is a cause for concern at a time when violence in other parts of the region seems to be declining," C. Uday Bhaskar, a strategic analyst said.

In Imphal, police cordoned off the blast site, near a commando training facility and forensic experts were examining pieces of metal to find out what caused the powerful blast.

"Our plan is to fence the border and step up foot patrolling along the border, otherwise it will be difficult to control the situation," a senior intelligence officer said from Imphal.

India says around 3,000 rebels, live and train in the camps inside the jungles of Kabaw Valley of Myanmar's Sagaing Division.

"We know where militants have their camps across the border, but we can't go inside Myanmar chasing them," said a senior military commander who requested not to be named.

India has a pact with Myanmar to share intelligence, but officials said it was not enough to stop the insurgency.

Militant groups accuse New Delhi of plundering the region's mineral and forest resources but investing little in return.

Burmese Journalist Wins Major Press Award

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 22, 2008

By LALIT K. JHA / NEW YORK - A Burmese journalist who works for The Associated Press has received the prestigious Journalism and Courage Award for 2008 from the International Women's Media Foundation.

Having worked as a reporter for nearly two decades in Burma, which is considered to be a graveyard for the free press, Aye Aye Win, has said that only a free press can be a guarantee to a free society.

"I have pledged to work as a journalist in my own country, Myanmar [Burma], to serve the people and country with a firm belief that a free and independent press is vital to a free society," she said. The award was accepted by John Daniszewski, the international managing editor of AP.

Praising Aye Aye Win's courage, Daniszewski said: "The AP's correspondent in Burma, now called Myanmar, is a humble, hard-working and largely unknown hero, who for nearly two decades has been speaking the truth about her country in the face of intimidation and bullying."

The award presentation ceremony was held at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in midtown Manhattan on Tuesday and attended by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and other honored guests.

"Aye Aye Win knows the risks she is taking. Both her father and her husband have been imprisoned by the Burmese generals, and she has often been threatened by arrests. But that has not stopped her," said Daniszewski in his remarks.

Daniszewski said Aye Aye Win represents the best tradition of journalism—that of telling the truth and helping to keep people informed and enlightened.

In her acceptance speech, which was read by Daniszewski, Aye Aye Win said Burma, a country ruled by the military for more than four decades, is overwhelmed by a host of problems that affect the ability of journalists to practice their profession free of fear, intimidation and unforeseen dangers.

"Journalism in Myanmar is a risky business," she said.

She said the military government rarely arrest journalists specifically for their work but rather detains and prosecutes them under a slew of criminal laws ranging from the Official Secrecy Act to defamation and high treason. Her father, a journalist for more than 60 years, has been in imprisoned three times, she said.

"Anyone in my country, particularly journalists, can at any time be arrested, interrogated and charged without any sound reason," she said. "A knock on the gate at midnight unnerves and traumatizes our lives."

[Saw Myint Than, chief correspondent of journal released](#)

Mizzima - Tuesday, 21 October 2008 16:27

by Nam Davies - New Delhi – The Chief Correspondent of the 'Flower' journal, detained for over a month for covering a double murder in Thingangyun, Rangoon, was released from custody yesterday evening after signing a personal bond.

Saw Myint Than of the weekly journal was released after the prosecutor Pol. Maj. Khin Maung Aye withdrew the case against him under section 34(d) of the Electronic Law.

He was produced in court yesterday at about 3:30 p.m. He was charged only in one case under the 'Electronic Law,' He was released after the prosecution withdrew his case.

But a journalist close to the weekly journal said that the Chief Correspondent had to sign a bond before being released. He had to pledge not to commit a similar crime in the future.

But the authorities did not elaborate or clarify what the 'similar crime' was.

He was charged with many cases including having unlawful associations and using an unauthorized internet connection when his cases were registered at the Kyauktada police station in Rangoon. Later the cases were withdrawn one by one.

Saw Myint Than is likely to be reassigned his previous work.

The police arrested him after the 'Irrawaddy' magazine website in exile posted a news item that the Rangoon Division Police Force summoned and reprimanded him for covering the double murder in Thingangyun, Rangoon Division.

The police accused him of having contacts with the 'Irrawaddy' news magazine. But both he and 'Irrawaddy' categorically denied this baseless accusation.

[Myanmar to build up to 60,000 low-cost houses in cyclone-hit regions](#)

Xinhua – 21 October 2008

YANGON -- Myanmar has targeted to build up to 60,000 low-cost houses for homeless cyclone victims in Ayeyawaddy and Yangon divisions hit by cyclone Nargis in early last May, a local weekly reported Tuesday.

The low-cost housing projects have been implemented by 69 private companies since June under the country's rehabilitation program and so far, 7,539 of such houses have been donated by the government and well-wishers, the Pyi Myanmar quoted the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement as saying.

These low-cost houses, each valued at 600,000 Kyats (500 U.S. dollars), have been or are being built in Ayeyawaddy division's Phyapon, Bogalay, Dedaye, Mawgyun and Laputta townships and Yangon division's Kawmu, Kungyangon and Thanlyin townships, the sources said.

During the storm, more than 370,000 houses in seven townships in Ayeyawaddy division and 40 townships in Yangon division were destroyed, the sources disclosed.

Some storm-hard-hit areas in Myanmar's Ayeyawaddy division including Dedaye and Laputta are in quick recovery with almost all ravaged houses being already rebuilt, according to recent official media report.

Several construction companies have rebuilt many housing estates for the survived cyclone victims in a number of villages.

Some hundreds of lakes as well as over 100 basic education schools in the storm-hit region have also been repaired and opened for the present academic year.

Besides, hundreds of destroyed rice mills in two storm-hit divisions of Yangon and Ayeyawaddy, have also resumed operation after prompt repair.

Deadly tropical cyclone Nargis hit five divisions and states - Ayeyawaddy, Yangon, Bago, Mon and Kayin on last May 2 and 3, of which Ayeyawaddy and Yangon inflicted the heaviest casualties and massive infrastructural damage.

The storm has killed 84,537 people, leaving 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured according to official death toll.

[Indonesia ratifies ASEAN charter](#)

AFP – 21 October 2008

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesia's parliament on Tuesday ratified the Southeast Asian charter committing ASEAN member nations to promote democracy and human rights, clearing the way for its formal adoption before year's end.

The country was the last member of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations to ratify the charter, which also sets out rules, transforms ASEAN into a legal entity and envisages a single free trade area by 2015.

It is now expected to be formally adopted at the regional bloc's annual summit in Bangkok in December.

But opponents in Indonesia criticised it as a purely symbolic document with no power to bring real democratic reform to errant members like military-ruled Myanmar.

Lawmakers said they had ratified it with four key conditions which will be submitted for further discussion, aimed at strengthening the charter and setting serious consequences for rule-breakers.

"The charter is open to amendments in the future and we can always fine-tune them along the way," Foreign Minister Hasan Wirajuda said.

He said he hoped the charter would bring human rights improvements in rogue ASEAN states like Myanmar.

"Once the charter is formed, we will see how serious Myanmar is in making its roadmap to democracy. We will see if it keeps to its promise," he said.

ASEAN consists of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The charter will give the bloc, much maligned as a pointless talking shop, greater clout in international negotiations but critics argue black sheep like Myanmar will continue to get away with gross human rights abuses.

Its proposed new rights body is toothless and the charter has no provision to sanction members such as Myanmar, where the junta has kept democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for most of the past 18 years.

Myanmar ratified the charter amid much fanfare at an ASEAN ministerial conference in Singapore in July.

The country's secretive junta is under European Union and United States sanctions over its long record of human rights abuses.

Lawmaker Marzuki Darusman, who was on the committee that helped draft the ratification law, said Indonesia must show "solidarity" with other member states on the charter but it still wanted changes.

"Some members of the parliament feel that as a big country we have been pressured to address the Myanmar issue so that it will conform to international norms," he said.

"We have to show that ratification is not just a formality... Non-compliance should not just be set aside, ignored or allowed to happen without responsibility."

Among Indonesia's conditions was the establishment of a rights body which "conforms to international standards" and provision for the suspension of non-compliant members, Darusman said.

ASEAN should also consider the possibility of decision-making by majority vote rather than consensus.

Asmara Nababan, head of the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights in Jakarta, said the charter was a step forward even if it needed improvements.

"This is a milestone for Indonesia and ASEAN and it will put human rights more at the centre of the agenda," he told AFP.

"But there is a lot of work to do to make it more effective in the promotion and protection of human rights if you compare the region to Europe and the United States."

Burma's future amid the global financial crisis

Mizzima - Tuesday, 21 October 2008 20:05

by Joseph Ball - Without yet knowing the end story of the current financial crisis gripping much of the world, valuable lessons for Burma's future – including the prospects and avenues for the positive development of the country – can be observed.

When the lights went off on the Soviet Union, pundits and analysts were quick to point to the failure of the command economy while simultaneously raining praise on the capitalist economic development model, and specifically the free-wheeling version trumpeted by the likes of Washington.

Then in 1997, as the Asian Financial Crisis wrecked havoc from Seoul to Jakarta, the world was told how no longer could the development models of the Asian Tigers be considered on the same plane as those of the West – while the notion of Asian Values took a pummeling from rights activists who were quick to link the so-called Asian Values with the formation of the then discredited Asian development models.

In short, economic crises have historically worked to confer legitimacy upon and acceptance of certain systems of development at the expense of alternative approaches and often associated non-financial values. This legitimacy then typically allows the perceived 'victors' greater influence and latitude in molding the direction of economic and financial approaches regionally, if not globally.

Now, as the effects of the financial turmoil in the world's major markets continue to reverberate, it is the financial system that has come to be identified most closely with the United States that is being made to appear dysfunctional in its lack of financial oversight and foresight.

Bidding to step in and replace the soiled individualist-centric model of economic growth is a pragmatic approach championed by China that seeks a symbiotic relationship between the public and private sectors in matters of economic and financial policy – in essence appreciably increasing the role of the state in the economic sector.

Whereas the International Monetary Fund, for more than a decade following the end of the Soviet empire, had preached upon the dais of global economics the boundless merits of free markets, drilling aspiring countries with the mantra of "less government is good government," the message is now clearly one of a need for increased regulation and oversight from governmental institutions – a blasphemous notion to be heard on the streets of Washington only scant years previously.

It may well transpire that 2008 is looked back on as the year in which Adam Smith's misunderstood invisible hand, long endowed with a certain mystique regarding Western development models, falls under the all-seeing eye of state authority.

Sick man of Asia no more

Almost exactly one hundred years ago, as its last Emperor assumed the throne in the form of two-year old Pu Yi, China was known as the "Sick man of Asia," a fractured economy and entity left largely to the mercy of external interests and objectives. No more.

Even before the latest financial avalanche triggered in the United States, China was poised, in many analysts' estimation, to overtake the U.S. economy within 20 years.

The International Monetary Fund, this month holding an emergency meeting on the grim outlook of the global economy, found time to announce that it expects the Chinese economy to grow at a clip approaching ten percent next year, even while the West braces to tough out the conditions of a possible deep recession. The assessment for China is the lowest such calculation for years, but still represents a considerable relative advantage.

China also holds the world's largest foreign reserves, amounting to some 1,810 billion dollars. And just last month Standard and Poor's upgraded the country's long-term sovereign credit rating from A to A+ in recognition of the country's "exceptional" economic prospects and strong financial position.

Such projections for China and the Chinese economy are made despite the Shanghai Stock Exchange taking its share of lumps over recent weeks. However, the crucial difference is that analysts look at China and see a negative economic impact in the market as predominantly a correction for problems overseas, as opposed to additionally reflecting inherent problems within China's domestic financial institutions and infrastructure.

"If you look around the world, China is doing pretty good right now, and the U.S. isn't," remarked C. Fred Bergsten, director of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, earlier this month.

With China's economic position currently portending a growing and possibly leading role for the country in the world's economy going forward, diplomats as well as monetary experts are lining up to get on board.

Since last year, when traces of many of the fissures now rending economies apart first became distinctly visible, Australia's foreign policy has become increasingly predicated upon the establishment and growth of strong ties with Beijing.

"My understanding is that China will continue to drive strong economic growth for its own national purposes, but that's also good for countries like Australia because China is such a major trading partner of ours," implored Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

Meanwhile, Michel Camdessus, a former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, recently proclaimed of Asia, "Your countries are now creditors of the world." And the biggest creditor of them all is China.

Nation building or national interest?

To be sure, nation building and national interest are not mutually exclusive concepts. But the decades ahead could well see the question of national interest weighing increasingly heavy in the calculations of policy makers regarding projects associated with nation building.

George Bush assumed the Presidency of the United States eight years ago with a reputation of abhorring the concept of nation building. Two terms later, nation building sits as a central tenet to his administration's legacy. It is a policy approach that likely will not survive the ensuing Presidential handover in January of next year – no matter who resides in the Oval Office.

The prospect of a deepening financial crisis will likely take a heavy toll on the countries most susceptible to promote a foreign policy distinctly cognizant of nation building, those in North America and Europe. This diminished financial capacity to incur such massive financial outlays will be paired with domestic electoral constituencies increasingly critical of elected officers who pursue such objectives over policies more directly linked with national, domestic economy, issues.

In contrast, China has shown little, if any, interest in nation building since the implementation of broad economic reforms under then Premier Deng Xiaoping, opting instead to pursue a foreign policy definitively focused on national interest. Unlike the early decades of the People's Republic, when politics of ideology figured authoritatively in the country's foreign policy calculations, Deng's China is almost singularly infatuated with the notion of national interest – with economic considerations first and foremost.

A clear example of this approach was in the pervading atmosphere of economic uncertainty instigated by the Asian financial crisis. While China did bail out Burma, it did so out of pure economic national interest, headlined by a desire for relative stability in Burma, concessions on natural resources and easy access of Burmese markets for Chinese products.

Policy imperatives for a future Burma

National interest and nation building obviously sleep together in matters concerning domestic policy. What, then, in the national interest of building a prosperous Burmese nation, can the present financial turmoil tell Burma's current and future leaders?

To the extent that the pervading political stagnation in Burma is resultant upon the notion that some country, group of countries or international agency will proactively, possibly even physically, intervene in Burma...such premonitions, at present, must be removed from any policy equation. Already unlikely, the external financing of nation building not intrinsically linked to national interest is likely to be prohibitively expensive for potential suitors in the foreseeable future.

Succinctly put, it is imperative that prospective ruling Burmese political parties develop strategic models for the future that incorporate components of both enhanced self-reliance and diversification than what is accounted for by present models.

Whatever Burma's domestic political orientation in the future, it does nothing to change the fact that Burma's development and economic fortunes will be substantially linked to its foreign relations and eventual "re"integration into the global economy. Understanding this, and in lieu of the current financial upheavals, is there an entity that both wants to and is capable of taking the lead in providing the assistance necessary to fuel a transformation of the Burmese state? The answer is yes, and it's China.

Burma's prospects for a brighter future are thus best served by nurturing strong bonds with China, the quicker the better for prospects of economic transformation when change does come to Burma.

In doing so, nobody need forfeit any political aspirations and differences between the countries and the people are certain, and welcomed, to exist. As seen, the Australian Prime Minister, at the head of a vibrant democratic society, is outwardly supportive and positive in assessing the importance to a democratic Australia of a strong and growing relationship between Canberra and Beijing. Similarly, China is vital to several U.S. industries, inclusive of such 'national' endeavors as the development of the U.S. space program.

A strategy of confrontation with, or relative ignoring of, China is a policy inimical to the interests of a future Burma – a fact laid bare by the recent gales of financial turmoil. It is up to Burma's leaders to recognize this, while ensuring that the Burmese state effectively prioritizes the interests of the Burmese people in dealing with China – without being unjustly abused in return.

[Myanmar Taunggyi chosen as one of 10 best ASEAN environmental conservation cities](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-21 21:42:39

YANGON -- Myanmar's Taunggyi, the capital of Shan state, has been chosen as one of the 10 best natural environmental conservation cities in the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN), the local Weekly Eleven news journal reported Tuesday.

It was so awarded at a ceremony held recently in Vietnam to encourage undertakings in environmental conservation in the region in the best way with upgraded level.

Taunggyi, a cold and hilly city lying 1.37 kilometers above sea-level, stands as the fourth biggest city of Myanmar with a population of 200,000.

The city is not only a commercial center for Shan state but also a place where ethnic minorities inhabit and travel.

The Inlay Lake, located near Taunggyi, is known as one of Myanmar's famous tourist sites attracting large number of world travelers.

Meanwhile, Myanmar is making efforts to extend its environmental conservation area up to 10 percent of the total of the country as part of its long-term plan of promoting eco-tourism.

Myanmar's present environmental conservation area remains at 4.7 percent that is 31,961 square-kilometers covered by 38 environmental conservation regions.

Of them, there set up 14 eco-tourism based camps mainly known as Hlawga Wildlife park, Yangon Zoological Garden, Inlay Lake Sanctuary, Mount Popa Park, Pyin Oo Lwin National Kandawgyi Garden, Khakaborazi National Park and Myainghewun Elephant Camp.

Of these eco-tourism facilities, the Khakaborazi National Park, located in Kachin state, northernmost part of the country, was highlighted as a significant one which will soon emerge as the first ever world heritage of Myanmar.

In 1998, Myanmar designated the area of Mount Khakaborazi as the national park to focus on conservation of environment and bio-diversities of eastern area of Himalayan mountain ranges as well as to safeguard the areas where Myanmar's mighty Ayeyawaddy River originates.

The park, covered an area of 3,811 square kilometers and with an altitude of between 900 meters and 5.7 kilometers, has a temperature of between 15 degree Celsius in maximum and -3 degree Celsius in minimum.

Visitors may enjoy scenic beauty of over 3,000 meters high snow-capped mountain ranges.

Rich in natural resources including wildlife and rare species of flora and fauna that attracts tourists, Myanmar is encouraging entrepreneurs to promote eco-tourism industry at the environmental conservation regions to earn income for the state.

According to official statistics, tourist arrivals in Myanmar in the fiscal year 2007-08 which ended in March, totaled 288,776 with 51,872 more registered in the first quarter of 2008-09.

[Myanmar blast victim was ex-monk turned bombmaker: state media](#)

AFP – 21 October 2008

YANGON — A man killed in a blast in Myanmar's biggest city Yangon was a former monk who accidentally blew himself up while trying to build a bomb, state media reported Tuesday.

The junta-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper published a graphic picture of the headless body of a man they said was Thet Oo Win, also a suspect in a bus stop bombing in downtown Yangon last month which injured seven people.

Thet Oo Win was killed Sunday at a house in northern Yangon, in the latest in a series of small explosions in military-run Myanmar.

"According to the items found at the scene, injuries and the way he lost his life, it is learned that the blast occurred when Thet Oo Win was improvising the bomb," the paper said.

It said authorities seized wires, batteries and detonators from the house.

The New Light of Myanmar accused Thet Oo Win of illegally fleeing across the border to Thailand after massive anti-junta protests led by monks in September 2007, and returning to Myanmar 10 days ago.

It said he had once been a Buddhist monk who "then lived as a layman and... was a drinker," but gave no other motive for his alleged actions.

Sunday's blast came after another small explosion Saturday near a football pitch in Yangon which caused minor damage but no injuries.

Myanmar also experienced four bomb blasts last month, one of which injured seven people at a bus stop near Yangon's City Hall.

The New Light of Myanmar said materials found at Thet Oo Win's house matched those used in the bus stop bombing.

Myanmar's junta has in the past blamed explosions on armed exile groups or ethnic rebels who have been battling the military rulers for decades, but the regime has also started pointing the finger at democracy activists.

State-run media in September accused two members of detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) of bombing pro-government offices in July.

The NLD won a landslide victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never allowed it to take office and Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest almost constantly since.

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962, partly justifying its grip on power by claiming the need to fend off ethnic rebellions.

[EU to raise Burma at Asia-Europe Meeting](#)

DVB - October 20, 2008

The European Union has been preparing to raise the issue of Burma at the upcoming ASEM in China, according to National League for Democracy-Liberated Area member Nyo Ohn Myint.

The EU Council is to hold a preparatory meeting on 22 October to discuss the Asia-Europe Meeting, which opens on 24 October.

The NLD-LA and National Council of the Union of Burma has prepared a draft to be sent to the meeting, Nyo Ohn Myint said.

The draft emphasises that the number of political prisoners has increased significantly to more than 2000, including NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and that the Burmese regime is avoiding dialogue with the opposition.

When asked whether host country China could obstruct discussion of Burma, Nyo Ohn Myint said that he thought China could itself come under pressure.

"Although the SPDC prime minister will be there, I expect that there could be a form of pressure on the Chinese government from Europe and Asia countries over the unfair detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," Nyo Ohn Myint said.

"This is because China is expected to practise a fair foreign policy after the Olympics and the continued detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will become a focus for pressure."

But former Burmese ambassador to China and veteran politician, Thakhin Chan Tun thinks differently.

"The EU might broach the subject but none of the ASEAN members will want to talk about it," Thakin Chan Tun said.

"So I think that they will try to avoid the subject. China will not talk about the good and bad things about Burma," he said.

"I don't think that it will be allowed to get to a point where actions are taken."

The main topics for discussion in the coming ASEM will be the global financial crisis, the energy crisis and regional security.

Burmese prime minister major-general Thein Sein is due to attend the meeting, though Burmese state-run media have reported that he is going to Beijing to attend the China-ASEAN trade fair.

ASEM comprises 45 partners including the European Commission and 27 European Union member states, the ASEAN secretariat and 10 ASEAN members and six other Asian countries, including China.

ASEM 7, the seventh Asia-Europe Meeting, is being held in Beijing, China, from 24 to 25 October.

Reporting by Khin Maung Soe Min

[U.N.'s Ban says frustrated by Myanmar inaction](#)

Reuters - Tue Oct 21, 2008 2:35am IST

By Patrick Worsnip - UNITED NATIONS - U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon voiced frustration on Monday that Myanmar's military government had failed to take up proposals by the world body to bring democracy to the southeast Asian nation.

Ban has been asked by the U.N. Security Council to do his utmost to pursue reforms in Myanmar, which drew international condemnation last year for a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters led by monks.

Ban's special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, last visited the former Burma in August, but failed to wring concessions from the junta or to meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for most of the past five years.

In a report, Ban said "it remains a source of frustration that meaningful steps have yet to be taken by the Myanmar authorities in response to the concerns and expectations of the United Nations and the international community."

Myanmar says it is pursuing its own seven-step "roadmap" to democracy. It announced overwhelming public support in a May referendum on an army-drafted constitution as part of a process meant to culminate in multiparty elections in 2010 and end a nearly 20-year political stalemate.

Western countries have condemned the referendum as a sham.

"It is unfortunate that specific suggestions of the United Nations to improve the credibility and inclusiveness of the political process have thus far not been taken up by the government," Ban said in his report for the General Assembly.

The main U.N. demands, backed by the Security Council and advanced by Gambari, have been for the junta to release political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and start a serious dialogue with the opposition.

Ban said that "expectations are high that the government of Myanmar will start taking substantive action" on those proposals. It was up to the junta "to genuinely demonstrate its stated commitment to cooperating with the United Nations."

Ban also called, however, on all countries that were interested in a solution in Myanmar to "work constructively together" in support of U.N. efforts.

Saying that only negotiated political solutions would work, he urged Myanmar's government and opposition to find ways to talk to each other.

Earlier this month, Ban said he would drop plans to make a long talked-about visit to Myanmar unless he was confident it would achieve tangible results in promoting democracy. He made a first visit there after Cyclone Nargis in May but has said he would like to return to discuss political issues.

The United Nations has been caught between a government reluctant to budge from its path and Western nations impatient for change. U.N. officials say Gambari believes Myanmar's leaders are only likely to favor a gradual transition from military rule on the model of Indonesia or Thailand.

[Enhanced dialogue among all parties vital for Myanmar's political future – Ban](#)

UN News Centre - 20 October 2008

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on Myanmar's Government and opposition to increase dialogue as the Asian country proceeds on the path toward national reconciliation and democratization, once again stressing the need for a credible and inclusive political process.

"The political challenges of any transition to democracy require negotiated political solutions," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes in his latest [report](#) to the General Assembly on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

“As the country reaches a delicate juncture in its political development, there is no real alternative to a peaceful process of national reconciliation and now is the time for the Government and opposition alike to find ways to talk to each other and work together in the interest of the nation,” he says.

The report highlights development in Myanmar between 23 October 2007 and 5 September 2008, as well as the activities of the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser, Ibrahim Gambari, who visited the country three times during that period.

Mr. Gambari had stated that the tangible results of his most recent visit in August “fell below our expectations,” but added that the UN “will not give up on working for national reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar.”

The Secretary-General echoed Mr. Gambari’s views when he told reporters last month that Myanmar has not experienced the anticipated political progress and its Government should take real measures towards setting up a more inclusive political process that promotes human rights.

He expresses similar sentiments in his report when he writes that it remains “a source of frustration that meaningful steps have yet to be taken by the Myanmar Government in response to the concerns and expectations of the United Nations and the international community in the context of the good offices process.”

Myanmar’s authorities are in the process of preparing for general elections scheduled for 2010 – the next step in the seven-step road map for democracy outlined by the Government.

Mr. Ban underlines that the future of Myanmar ultimately rests with the Government and its people, and reiterates that the role of the UN is to ascertain the positions of all parties and facilitate their efforts to work together through dialogue towards a mutually acceptable process of national reconciliation and democratization.

Noting that there is no alternative to dialogue to ensure that all stakeholders can contribute to the future of their country, he stresses that the release of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners will be key for the resumption of an enhanced, all-inclusive substantive and time-bound dialogue.

The release of all political prisoners, including Ms. Suu Kyi, as well as the need for an enhanced, substantive and time-bound dialogue between her and the Government, are among the key areas of concern for Mr. Gambari as he carries out the good offices role entrusted to him by the Assembly.

“The Secretary-General and his Special Adviser have therefore consistently emphasized that only a credible and inclusive political process — based on mutual understanding and compromise by all stakeholders — can help to advance the prospects of durable peace, national reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar.

“In this regard, it is unfortunate that specific suggestions of the United Nations to improve the credibility and inclusiveness of the political process have thus far not been taken up by the Government,” states the report.

Mr. Ban adds that despite the Government’s efforts in implementing its road map process and addressing the challenges facing the country, the political situation in Myanmar has become “even more complex and challenging and potentially more polarized, drawing increased attention from the international community, including the Security Council.”

The UN also remains concerned about ongoing reports of armed conflict and associated human rights abuses and humanitarian problems in ethnic minority areas, particularly in Kayin and Kayah states.

“Substantive talks leading to the sustainable cessation of hostilities between the Government and those armed ethnic groups still actively fighting need to be concluded, with a spirit of compromise on both sides,” he writes.

[Time for Europe to confront Burma's generals](#)

Mizzima News - Monday, 20 October 2008 17:57

Amnesty International is calling on the French government, as current President of the European Union, to make the human rights situation in Burma a focal point of the upcoming Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Addressed on Friday of last week to French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, the EU and French delegations of Amnesty International are urging the French mission to raise three seminal issues regarding the situation in Burma: the 2010 elections, political persecution and crimes against humanity in eastern Burma.

Regarding the proposed 2010 general election, the petitioners write, "[R]ather than attempting to introduce the rule of law and respect for human rights to Myanmar, this constitutional process seeks to perpetuate and legitimise the government's continuing human rights abuses and ensure impunity for past, present and future violations."

Additional concern is expressed for what Amnesty decries as positive remarks from members of the international community on the junta's 7-step roadmap to democracy, of which the 2010 election is to be step number five.

If elections are to take place in two years' time, the constitution, judged to be approved by authorities in May, must be "radically reformed or replaced," according to the letter.

Sighting an alarming doubling in the political prisoner population in the country since last year's Saffron Revolution, Amnesty further believes that the "ASEM summit can provide an opportunity for the French Presidency to implement the EU guidelines on HRDs (human rights defenders) and to raise concerns about the general situation for prisoners of conscience in Myanmar."

Lastly, in reference to the human rights situation in the eastern part of the country, Amnesty refers to an in-house report which detailed a two-and-a-half year offensive in that part of the country, commencing in November 2005, which it claims was the largest of the past decade and for the first time identified civilians as the primary military target of the Burmese army.

The 7th ASEM summit is to be held on the 24th and 25th of this month in Beijing, China. The grouping currently brings together 45 states, but it is expected that membership will increase by a half dozen this year, including the admission of India.

[Burma's resolve - The Burmese people have shown astonishing resilience in the wake of cyclone Nargis, but the international community must do more to support them](#)

New Statesman - Published 20 October 2008

David Hockaday

It is a given that for every force there is an equal and an opposite reaction. So when the destructive force of cyclone Nargis devastated the Ayeyarwady Delta on the night of the 2 May this year, the question arising was: "how would the country respond?"

Although the cyclone left 140,000 people dead or missing, and seriously affected 2.4 million more, the answer was quick and definitive.

Within two days, monasteries, individuals, self help groups, staff of national charities, international non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies (many of whom had families and homes affected by this disaster) had dusted themselves off and launched an incredible aid effort. They took food and essential relief items to absolutely isolated villages, by any means possible.

Although there was a tragic lack of readiness for this cyclone – an all too frequent event in this region – and although the government request for international assistance was delayed, there was, and remains a massive humanitarian response.

This disaster has shown that when the extraordinary resilience of a local population is backed up by international support, a powerful and constructive force for good can be unleashed.

The Delta is full of stories of courage; how people climbed trees and hung on for hours despite the lashing and stinging saline rain and howling winds; how friends pulled loved ones from the swollen rivers;

how people sat out the cyclone on rooftops; how people went to extraordinary lengths to find missing members of their families to reunite in the rubble.

I heard from three brothers who survived a capsized ship by treading water and floating on logs for hours. They survived for three days by eating coconuts and drinking rain water and were finally reunited at a temporary camp 14 days later.

The international community, local government and national staff of non-governmental organisations have undoubtedly played largely successful roles in the aid effort through the provision of essential humanitarian aid in the days following the cyclone – distributing much needed tarpaulins for shelter, soap and cooking utensils, mosquito nets and jerry cans for fetching water to hundreds of thousands of people. This was all carried out across a vast geographical area typified by swamps and huge interconnecting rivers.

The job of the aid workers has been made easier by the incredible spirit of the local population. It was observed as early as July that in many areas, over 75% of people affected by the cyclone had rebuilt their homes.

Despite the chaos following the immediate days after the cyclone, rice was planted and in some areas a reasonable harvest is expected. Even in some of the most heavily affected and remote locations, such as Middle Island in the Western Delta which bore the full brunt of the storm, markets are springing back up again.

Tea rooms and restaurants are full of the bustle of daily life. I even stumbled upon a landowner who had managed to rig up a satellite TV system and was showing English Premier League football – for a price of course - to a willing and animated crowd.

There is much more to be done in Burma and the reconstruction effort will be a long, painful and difficult road not helped by the fact that the United Nations appeal stands pitifully half-empty. This means that essential recovery and reconstruction work such as re-building roads, health services and schools will not take place on the scale necessary. Access to fresh clean water in the Delta is also going to be an issue as the dry season progresses, as is the availability of food in some areas.

Humanitarians will point to the fact that in neighbouring Bangladesh a similar cyclone this year killed far fewer people because of simple preparedness initiatives supported by the government. Basic lessons from Bangladesh can be used to improve future preparation in Burma and elsewhere.

But concentrating on the terrible loss of life in Burma does a disservice to the incredible acts of heroism and tenacity of the people who actually survived that night.

The people of Burma have shown that through resolve, enterprise and bravery in the face of adversity, a constructive force for good can be achieved that runs as powerful as the force of nature that caused this devastation in the first place. It is time for the international community to recognise this and to go that next step with further support.

David Hockaday is Emergencies Adviser Burma (Myanmar) for Save the Children UK

[**MYANMAR: Temporary shelters need permanent upgrade**](#)

IRINnews.org - 20 October 2008

MHAWBI - Five months after Cyclone Nargis deluged Myanmar's low-lying Ayeyarwady Delta, tens of thousands of people are still in need of proper shelter.

Myint Aung, 35, lost a child and everything he owned to the category four cyclone, which caused the worst natural disaster in living memory. With no money to rebuild, the landless farmer has ended up squatting by the roadside outside Mhawbi village, 10 minutes from Pyapon town, on the Pyapon River, with hundreds of others with just a 5x6ft wide tarpaulin for shelter.

"This [tarpaulin] hut is unlikely to last more than two or three months," he complained, pointing to the already tattered roof, only 4ft high. He said his two children were unable to stay inside in the afternoon due to the stifling heat.

Before the cyclone, he and his family lived in a simple thatched bamboo house near the paddy field of their employer.

Nargis affected more than two million people, made tens of thousands homeless and left more than 140,000 dead or missing when it hit the southern coastal region in May.

According to the [Post Nargis Joint Assessment report \(PONJA\)](#) by the UN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Myanmar government, the cyclone affected 800,000 housing units - 450,000 were totally destroyed, while another 350,000 were damaged.

The worst-hit houses were built of wood and bamboo, accounting for half of all housing in the stricken areas.

While the initial response by UN agencies and NGOs to providing immediate life-saving shelter was remarkable, the lifespan of the materials provided is only six to 12 months and some of the plastic sheeting is already deteriorating and tearing.

Most households do not have the resources to rebuild or repair more durable shelters, either because they do not have cash or because materials, such as thatch, are not readily available.

"When it rains heavily, we get flooded inside the hut because rainwater flows inside, and also rainwater enters through the tattered plastic sheets," said Aye Khaing, 36. Her family of eight sleep on plastic sheeting on the dirt floor.

These makeshift shelters often consist of little more than sticks and thatch with perhaps a plastic sheet. Upgrading them would mean rebuilding with decent materials, bamboo, wood and possibly tin roofs.

Upgrading vital

"The families have already exhausted their savings, and are not able to keep repairing their homes, let alone bring them up to a comfortable standard," said Annie Scarborough, shelter coordinator for the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

"There are tens of thousands of people whose shelters need to be upgraded so they can last one or two years," David Evans, acting head of the UN's Human Settlements Programme, [UN-HABITAT](#), told IRIN in Yangon, the former capital.

He explained that at least 20 percent of families whose houses were totally destroyed were categorised as vulnerable. For these families of pregnant women, the sick, elderly and disabled, it was not enough to supply building materials - they needed support to construct a durable shelter to last at least 24 months.

UN-HABITAT said serious advocacy work was needed to convince donors to fund longer-term shelter solutions. "We hope a much wider range of donors will understand the priority for shelter provision and support early recovery process and reduce the burden which currently rests with a small number of donor countries," Evans said.

So far the only funds received had been US\$600,000 to lead the shelter coordination cluster. Another \$400,000 will be available in November for training artisans and building demonstration shelters with Disaster Risk Reduction features.

Now that the emergency phase is over, surveys are under way that will help to assess the shelter needs. Arjan Blankan, recovery delegate of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, said: "We will find out who hasn't got adequate shelter, and we will try to address this issue."

In the meantime, many families are worried about the coming winter as without proper walls they fear the cold will affect the health of children and the elderly.

[Burmese Migrant Women in Thailand Targeted by Rape Gangs](#)

Irrawaddy - Monday, October 20, 2008

By LAWI WENG - Burmese migrant women working in the factories of Mahachai, in Thailand's Samut Sakhon Province, run a high risk of being sexually abused and raped, according to Thai human rights groups.

Mahachai has the highest concentration of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, most of them employed in the area's seafood processing plants.

A lawyer with the Mahachai-based Raks Thai Foundation said about 30 Burmese migrant women had been raped in the area in the first eight months of 2008.

Another rights group, the Labor Rights Promotion Network, said it was working on the investigation of six cases of alleged rape.

The network's director, Sompong Srakawe, said about two women fell victim to gang rape in the Mahachai area every month.

The Raks Thai Foundation lawyer said legal proceedings were now under way in the case of two Burmese women who complained they had been held against their will and raped by members of a human trafficking gang.

Rights groups accuse the Thai authorities of failing to take rape complaints seriously enough.

"Street gangs say 'the Burmese women are illegal migrants and we can't be arrested if we rape them'," said Sompong.

According to the Raks Thai Foundation lawyer, only five percent of rape complaints are followed up by the authorities. "If you are Burmese, your case is delayed and you can't get fair justice," he said.

Victims are often dragged from their rooms and taken away in trucks to be gang-raped, he said.

Hong Son, a factory worker from Ye Township, in Mon State, said a 14-year-old acquaintance had been abducted by a gang, beaten up and raped.

A member of the Raks Thai Foundation said shame and the fear of deportation caused some victims to remain silent.

Around one million Burmese migrants are registered to work legally in Thailand, while about the same number are illegally employed, according to the Mahachai-based Labor Protection Department.

[Pipeline will not benefit the Burmese people](#)

Mizzima - Tuesday, 21 October 2008 14:18

by Htet Win - Burma should seriously and cautiously consider the building of a China-Burma oil and gas pipeline, as the project will not foster the long-term economic development of the country.

The proposed oil and gas pipeline, to pass through Burma from the coast of Arakan state to Muse on the Chinese-Burmese border, would provide little benefit for the military ruled country, while China would immensely benefit from the project.

Burma should not let the pipeline be built if it is to be managed by Chinese and dominated by fellow Chinese throughout the senior level of management.

The building of an oil and gas pipeline, as opposed to trade, is akin to permitting China to establish fixed assets in Burma.

A pipeline is not a factory, not a business. Burma will not benefit much from such an agreement, merely receiving a transit fee while being held responsible for the security of the project.

In short, Burma should be allowed to operate the section of the pipeline that runs through Burmese territory. Such an approach, in addition to the transit fee, would endow Burmese with additional job opportunities and technological advancement.

If China wants to build pipelines, they must grant financial aid, material and technological assistance, while permitting the pipeline to be operated by Burmese.

Though the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China approved the pipeline to link the deep-water port of Sittwe with Kunming in early 2007, a Rangoon-based energy expert and businessman close to senior officials at Burma's Ministry of Energy said there is so far no clear plan for the implementation of the project.

The businessman, mainly involved in engineering and offshore development, said Burma cannot significantly benefit from the project, despite some expected job creation for both skilled and unskilled labor, due to the projected high cost of construction.

Normally when a pipeline is erected, over 80 percent of the cost goes into raw materials and only 20 percent toward labor, logistics and service work.

However another businessman, who provides technical services in the energy infrastructure business, holds a different view of the project.

More opportunities for Burmese will be available as the pipeline will pass through highly forested areas and mountain ranges, the latter necessitating the completion of several tunnels.

He went on to say that over one thousand workers would be needed for the project.

Yet, unlike the Thai-Burma gas pipeline project in which Burmese gas is purchased, the China-Burma oil and gas pipeline is intended simply to transport oil and gas from Africa and the Middle East to China, thus avoiding the Strait of Malacca.

In summary, Burma's current policy of simply jumping at any chance to earn hard currency for the benefit of the ruling elite ignores the long-term best interests of the state and over 50 million Burmese people.

[Campaigners overjoyed at success of garment boycott](#)

Mizzima - Monday, 20 October 2008 18:31

by Solomon - New Delhi – United Kingdom retailer Cotton Traders has said it will sever business links with military-ruled Burma, less than a week after campaigners launched a boycott against the clothing company for sourcing merchandise from the troubled Southeast Asian country.

An official in the Director's Office of Cotton Traders in Cheshire, England, told Mizzima that the company will pull out all business from Burma, as they have received numerous calls inquiring as to their links with Burma.

"We have already issued press statements on it [the company's plan to pull out of Burma]," the official, who did not identify herself, told Mizzima by telephone.

Cotton Traders' decision to pull out of Burma came only days after The Burma Campaign UK launched a public boycott against the clothing retailer for sourcing products from Burma, whose military rulers maintain a dubious human rights record.

The Burma Campaign UK, a group advocating for human rights and democracy in Burma, said they welcome the decision by Cotton Traders, whose Product Director, Paul Hawkins, informed them that, "No new styles will be placed in Burma and as such Cotton Traders has ceased to source product from Burma."

"They [Cotton Traders] stopped because of the boycott campaign we launched and thanks to the hundreds of our supporters," Johnny Chatterton, Campaigns Officer at the rights group, told Mizzima.

Chatterton said that according to the British government there are around 30 million U.S. dollars worth of clothing imported to the United Kingdom every year from Burma, though the exact figures related to Cotton Traders are unknown.

"Cotton Traders haven't disclosed to us just how much they have been importing," said Chatterton, adding that his group will continue to investigate other companies who may be sourcing from Burma.

He said they have officially inquired into several companies, including The Animal, Bay Trading By Design Plc, Ciro Citterio, Etam, First Sport, Harrods, Intersport, Jane Norman, Jeffrey Rogers, Jo Bloggs, Liberty, Lillywhites and Mambo, as to whether or not they maintain business links with Burma.

"We have urged them to disclose if they have merchandise from Burma, but those companies have refused to reply us. We will continue to investigate them," he added.

The British Government has a decade-long policy of discouraging trade with Burma and has called on British companies not to operate there. In 2003, the United States banned imports of clothing from Burma.

According to The Burma Campaign UK, over 140 major high street clothing retailers, including M&S, Next, ASDA, H&M, Harrods, Debenhams, House of Fraser and BHS, have policies not to source from Burma.

"Cotton Traders have made the right decision and pulled out of Burma. However, they should never have been in the country at all," remarked Chatterton.

"By sourcing clothes from Burma they have helped to fund a dictatorship that uses rape, torture and murder to oppress its own people," he added.

In September, Lloyd's of London informed all of their agents to reconsider their business links with Burma after the financial behemoth came under similar pressure from both activists and Parliamentarians.

[Man killed in second Yangon blast in 24 hours: Myanmar police](#)

AFP – 20 October 2008

YANGON — One man was killed on Sunday in a small bomb blast in northeast Yangon, a police official said, the second such bombing in Myanmar's main city within 24 hours.

"A man was killed during a bomb blast in Shwe Tyi Tha township," said the Yangon police official, who did not want to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

He said the explosion hit a residential area at about 5:30 pm (1100 GMT), but gave no further details.

A similar bomb exploded near a football field in northeast Yangon at about 7:00 pm on Saturday, causing minor damage but no injuries. Police said they also managed to defuse a second explosive device that night.

Sunday's blast was in the same suburb as an explosion at a pro-government office in July, which state media blamed on two members of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Myanmar's junta had in the past blamed bombings on armed exile groups or ethnic rebels who have been battling the military rulers for decades.

The NLD won elections in 1990, but the junta never allowed them to govern and has kept Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for most of the years since.

Myanmar saw four bomb blasts last month, one of which killed two people and wounded 10 at a video cafe in Yangon. Authorities later arrested an ethnic Karen rebel fighter in connection with the bombing.

[Pressure sought on Myanmar over aid](#)

The Jakarta Post | Sat, 10/18/2008

Khin Ohmar - Jakarta - The UN and ASEAN must put more pressure on Myanmar's military junta over the proper distribution of international assistance to the victims of Cyclone Nargis, a Myanmar activist says.

"A lot of international aid was misused by SPDC (State Peace and Development Council). The military sold many donated items in the markets. There should be an independent system to monitor and

evaluate aid distribution to ensure that it reaches the right people," Khin Ohmar of the Burma Partnership said to *The Jakarta Post* on Friday.

Ohmar also blasted the "Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA)" prepared by the UN, ASEAN and the SPDC.

"It (PONJA) cannot be considered truly comprehensive nor objective as it omits references to certain aspects, including intimidation and human rights abuses and of the real situation in the cyclone hit areas. It was prepared in collusion with the SPDC," Ohmar said.

Ohmar with Yuki Akimoto of Japan's Burma Information Network and National Democratic Institute's director Stephanie J. Lynn discussed the newly launched alternative to PONJA, "Post-Nargis Analysis: The Other Side of the Story", with the *Post*.

"We felt the need to tell the other side of the post-Nargis story. Our analysis is based mainly on documentation by civil society organizations and true stories from the cyclone victims," Ohmar said.

Produced collectively by 19 NGOs and authored by Akimoto, "Post Nargis Analysis" was launched in Jakarta on Thursday.

"Indonesia is the biggest country in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN Secretariat is located in Jakarta. That's why we chose to release the report in Jakarta," Ohmar said.

In early May 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar. Around 2.5 million people lost their houses and livelihoods, and around 140,000 lost their lives.

The junta, which has a notorious record for suppressing human rights, blocked international aid for several days after the disaster struck. After strong pressure from ASEAN and the international community, the regime finally allowed foreign aid workers to help cyclone victims.

During the distribution of aid, there were reports of aid being confiscated and sold on the market, and also of aid being withheld to those who refused to vote in a referendum to prolong the junta's power.

[**Myanmar PM to attend China-ASEAN expo**](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-17 12:30:14

YANGON, Oct. 17 () -- Myanmar Prime Minister General Thein Sein will attend the upcoming 5th China-ASEAN Expo and the 5th China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit to be held in Nanning, China in the near future, according to an official announcement from Nay Pyi Taw Friday.

The event is scheduled for Oct. 22-25 in Nanning, the capital of Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

As part of its series of the expo, China-ASEAN Information Ministers Meeting was held on Oct. 13 to 16, attended by Myanmar Minister of Information Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan.

China-ASEAN expo has been launched annually since 2004.

According to Chinese official figures, China-ASEAN bilateral trade amounted to 202.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2007, up 25.9 percent. Of the total, China's import from ASEAN stood 108.36 billion dollars, while its export to ASEAN took 94.14 billion dollars, realizing the trade target three years ahead set by leaders of both sides.

Statistics also showed in 2007, China-Myanmar bilateral trade hit 2.057 billion U.S. dollars, up 40.9 percent compared with 2006. Of the total, China's exports to Myanmar took 1.686 billion dollars, up 39.6 percent, while its import from Myanmar stood 371 million dollars, up 46.9 percent. China enjoyed a trade surplus of 1.315 billion dollars.

[**Jade and gem sale earns Myanmar \\$175 million**](#)

AP - 17 October 2008

YANGON, Myanmar — Myanmar has earned more than \$175 million (130 million euros) from its latest government-sponsored sale of gems, despite a U.S. ban on their import, an official said Friday.

Most of the revenue from the 13-day auction that ended Thursday was earned from the sales of jade, which fetched more than \$172 million (128 million euros).

Gemstones and pearls were the other items offered.

An organizer of the gems emporium, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to release information, said 2,648 gem merchants participated from nearly a dozen countries, including China, Thailand, Japan and Canada.

In July, President Bush signed legislation banning the import of gems from Myanmar, which already was the voluntary policy of retailers like Tiffany's and Bulgari.

It is one of several economic sanctions Washington has applied to Myanmar's military government because of its poor human rights record and failure to hand over power to a democratically elected government.

U.S. officials said at that time that Myanmar has been evading earlier gem-targeting sanctions by laundering stones in other countries before they are shipped to the United States.

Myanmar gem sellers say the sanctions have very little impact on their business because they rely on Chinese and Thai gem merchants, who are the major buyers.

The largest contingent at this latest sale was the more than 2,200 gem merchants from China, which is the main market for Myanmar jade. The second largest contingent of more than 70 gem merchants were Thais, who usually dominate the gems and jewelry bidding.

Due to U.S. economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar in July 2003, which froze all U.S. dollar remittances to the country, international business transactions including the gem sales are done in euros.

Organized by the Mines Ministry, the events are major revenue earners for Myanmar — one of the biggest jade and gem producing countries in the world. Myanmar has held gem emporiums since 1964, and organizers launched a midyear sale in 1992.

[Tourist arrival in Burma drops by over 33,000](#)

Mizzima - Friday, 17 October 2008 20:30

by Zarni - Tourist arrival from Mingalardon airport in the mid-year period has recorded a sharp decline by more than 33,000 compared to the corresponding period last year, according to an official report.

The report prepared by the Burmese Ministry of Tourism available with Mizzima reveals that there has been a decrease of 33,192 tourists in the last count of visitors coming to the cash-strapped country through the main international gate way in Rangoon.

During the period April to August, 2008, the highest number of visitors was 40,671 from Asia while West Europe accounted for 8,053. The third place was occupied by North America at 4,076 whereas Africa had the lowest figures at 209.

The report suggested that the number of tourists visiting Burma in 2007 fell after the monk-led uprising in September 2007. The figures decreased by over 20,000 a fall of 5.9 per cent compared to 2006.

In 2006, over 2, 63,000 tourists visited Burma thorough the Mingalardon airport.

The situation in the tourism industry is going from bad to worse as more travel agencies complain of reservations becoming rare for November from the European market although the tourism season in Burma starts from mid-September.

"Some Asian tours are still operating but the numbers are few," said an agent targeting Asian and European visitors.

A tour operator of a travel agency targeting the French market said 'We only have a package tour in mid-October this year. Last year we were booked for the whole month'.

[The intricacies of U.N., Ban Ki-moon's role in Burma](#)

The China Post - Monday, October 20, 2008

By Nehginpao Kipgen - On March 14, 2008, I authored an analytical article entitled "Don't Blame Gambari" in reference to Ibrahim Gambari's largely perceived unyielding mission to Burma.

The article discussed how the Special Advisor was assigned a critical diplomatic task without an enforcement power from the U.N. Security Council. His latest August visit was also bashed by the Burmese opposition as an abject failure. The National League for Democracy (NLD) called it a "waste of time."

With the U.N. Special Advisor's diplomatic efforts seemingly waning, voices of concern and frustration have overwhelmed the good offices of the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

One advantage the Secretary General might have over his Special Advisor, who is a Nigerian diplomat, is that Ban was a South Korean career diplomat who may be better versed in dealing with Asia.

When Ban Ki-moon became the first Asian to hold the Secretary General's post after U Thant of Burma (1961-1971), there was high expectation for some sort of solution to Burma's political problems.

Unambiguously, the office of the U.N. Secretary General has embarked on a number of unprecedented initiatives in attempts to effect change in Burma. It is rather a question of efficacy. One most notable of Ban's involvement is the formation of 'Group of Friends of the Secretary General on Myanmar.'

In the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, the U.N. Secretary General made a humanitarian visit to Burma. Although not expressed explicitly, Ban could have sensed the xenophobic nature of the isolated military leaders. This was the last meeting between Senior General Than Shwe and the United Nations leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The good offices of the Secretary General have given its shots, but with no bullets. If no change is happening from within Burma, the international community might have to wait a day for the Security

Council veto system to change, or a surprising move by China and Russia siding with the three other permanent members or abstaining from voting.

Nehginpao Kipgen is the General Secretary of U.S.-based Kuki International Forum (www.kukiforum.com) and a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Burma (1947-2004).

Fissures in NLD, 110 youths resign

Mizzima - Thursday, 16 October 2008 22:58

by Phanida - Chiang Mai: A dispute with senior leaders has led to 110 youth members of the main opposition political party the National League for Democracy in Burma to submit their resignation today.

Differences between the youth members from party branches and the party Central Executive Committee members surfaced over choosing the leadership of the youth brigade.

"We'd like to choose our future leader according to the wishes of the majority. The leader who is going to lead us should be able to lead the Burmese people and must be politically adept. So we chose to resign," Nay Chi Win, a former member of the party information committee told Mizzima.

"Some will criticize us for creating fissures in the party. But we can be patient. We left with the idea that it would be better walk on our own feet instead of pushing this unproductive train engine," he added.

The resignations came a day after senior members of the party had formed a team to monitor and implement the activities of the youth members. It has exposed the cracks in the party.

The majority of the youths who resigned are from the township branches in the Rangoon division jurisdiction, who had adopted a hard-line stance against the military regime.

The Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi led party spokesperson Nyan Win said the party has not accepted the resignations yet.

"We have to decide and they said they don't want to talk now. At the moment we don't know much. Let me not talk about it because there is no permission yet to give out information," Nyan Win said.

Kyaw Kyaw Min, who is in the group which resigned, accused aged party Chairman Aung Shwe of ignoring the desires of the youth.

"They also rejected the stand that there is need for 'mutual respect'. That is violating the (party's) principles. They ignored the youth. It has not come from my heart but from my brain," he added.

The NLD yesterday announced a team to implement the activities of the youth members.

However, the reason for the differences in the party is not clear yet but a youth member, who spoke to Mizzima, said that the CEC chose some people who are over 35 years of age. According to him Aung San Suu Kyi had set a guideline to choose only youth leaders under 35 years of age.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been in one or another form of house arrest for 13 years since 1988.

The NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 general elections but the junta refused to hand over power.

The team of advisors for youth members chosen by the party CEC include May Hnin Kyi, Ohn Kyaing, Dr. Myo Aung, Tun Zaw Zaw, Tin Htut Oo, Khin Tun. The implementation team leaders are Myo Nyunt, Hla Oo and Aye Tun.

The Propaganda and Organizing team leaders include Myint Htay, Myint Ngwe, Aung Soe, Saw Maung Thein, and Htay Ngwe while the Disciplinary members are Ba Maung and Thin Zaw.

The youths, who resigned, are from Hledan, Kamaryut, Insein, Tontay, Pabedan, Kyauktadar, Mayankone, South Dagon, Thanlyin, South Oakalar, Nouth Oakakar and Mingalartaungnyunt townships.

Aid groups blast ASEAN-led report on Myanmar relief effort

AFP - 16 October, 2008

JAKARTA — A coalition of humanitarian groups heavily criticised Thursday a report on Myanmar's cyclone disaster, saying it glossed over the junta's obstruction of aid and human rights abuses.

The Burma Partnership, which represents 19 aid organisations, released an "alternative" report to provide what it said was a more accurate picture of the response to Cyclone Nargis, which left 138,000 people dead or missing in May.

"When we studied the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment report prepared by the UN, ASEAN and the Burmese regime, we realised that it failed to describe the obstruction of aid and human rights abuses committed by the military regime in the areas affected by the cyclone," Khin Ohmar of the Burma Partnership told a press conference.

"As independent civil society organisations, we felt the need to tell the other side of the post-Nargis story."

The generals ruling Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, drew international outrage by refusing to allow a foreign-led aid response in the immediate aftermath of the storm.

But they dropped their resistance after coaxing from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) chief Surin Pitsuwan.

The official joint report was released to much fanfare at an ASEAN conference in Singapore in July.

But Ohmar said it failed to highlight issues such as blocking and misappropriation of aid and substandard treatment of survivors at relief camps.

It omitted cases of human rights violations such as orphans turned into child soldiers, survivors forced to do reconstruction work and farm land confiscated by the military regime, she said.

The coalition's recommendations include an independent system to monitor aid distribution and for all relief agencies to make public their activities.

"We hope international governments will consider using the new report to ensure funding reaches people who need the most help and that the recovery process will be implemented with the most transparency and accountability," Ohmar said.

Thai MP and coalition member Kraisaak Choonhavan criticised Surin for failing to meet the organisers to discuss the alternative report.

He said he felt "let down" by Surin's late cancellation of a meeting in Jakarta, home to the ASEAN secretariat.

"They did not give any reason for cancelling. I feel let down and it makes it necessary for us to be more vocal. I am very disappointed," he said.

[Burma's misery: Supporters of World Food Day can find in Burma a case study in the lethal combination of climate change, poverty and politics](#)

guardian.co.uk, Thursday October 16 2008 20.10 BST

[Thaung Htun](#)

Today, the Food and Agriculture Organisation's [World Food Day](#) obliges the world and its leaders to consider the issue of global hunger. A particular theme this year is climate change and its impact on poverty and hunger. While the role of climate change is significant, the matter of political will casts a broader shadow across world hunger. This year's World Food Day is, as a result, somewhat hollow.

[Burma](#) stands as a case study for the combined effects of poverty and hunger, climate change and politics. In short, the stresses created by these dynamics have created a collapsing system in which the majority of Burmese are in danger of being crushed.

The actions of Burma's military regime represent a situation whereby climate change and its impacts on hunger are actively utilised for political gain. Currently, for instance, there are reports that the regime is creaming off 10% of post-cyclone aid coming into Burma in the wake of [this May's disaster](#) as "exchange transfer costs". It's a clear case of profiting from the effects of climate change and hunger.

Under the military, rural communities have been decimated by being forced to destroy vegetable and other staple croplands and to replace them with the regime's designated exportable cash crops, such as tea and biofuels.

A life-threatening famine is emerging in Chin state, western Burma, for instance, while the junta does nothing. [Plagues of rats](#) gorging on a rare crop of bamboo flowers are razing community plots and destroying any remaining semblance of food security. Again, politics stands in the way of necessity.

As the government elected in Burma's last free and fair elections, the [National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma](#) is committed to raising Burma's understanding and action on climate change issues, both domestically and regionally, in direct contrast to the current regime.

We will seek to aim funding, such as that which we may be able to attract from foreign donors and investors, to better manage Burma's exposure to climate change and to alleviate hunger. We would look to develop rural investment opportunities as a means of improving the sector's sustainability profile and to help rural communities develop strategies and technologies designed to better manage climate change.

We aim to develop trade relationships that incorporate sustainability issues and would target 100% self-sufficiency in staple crops where sustainable. We would investigate options for improving regional trade exchanges and would discuss the implementation of early warning systems, identifying and tracking climate change focal points and developing joint disaster risk management strategies.

Our approach to climate change and hunger in Burma would essentially be to focus on Burma's farmers – around 65% of the country's workforce – to help them understand climate change and how they might better manage their surroundings, while looking to energise the agricultural sector and industrialise and modernise the economy in environmentally and socially sustainable ways.

Such goals might be well attuned to the World Food Day programme. The FAO have looked to encourage such agendas. We are making the connections between hunger and climate change the world community is encouraging.

We might expect to be held up as a positive case for the World Food Day. Yet, our policies remain trapped in the black hole of Burma's untenable military regime and are themselves starved by the failure of international political will.

Rather than emerging as a positive case study of a nation's approach to hunger and climate change, Burma is something of a black mark. Today, Burma stands as an example of how climate change and hunger, rather than being tackled by the international community, are actually being substantiated by inherent political weaknesses and shortcomings of the current methodologies.

The global community remains thwarted by the military junta's stonewalling. As our country's rightfully elected government, we are denied government even as our people starve and climate change, one of hunger's creators, is ignored.

While the broad agendas of World Food Day are worthy of support, no one can deny the political barriers which act as obstacles to activism around climate change and hunger alleviation. Were World Food Day instead focused on questions of political will and global political dysfunction, we might begin to get to the crux of the issue. It's a point the case of Burma proves only too well.

[NEWS ANALYSIS: Burma's New Constitution: Radical Change or Fig Leaf?](#)

Irrawaddy - Thursday, October 16, 2008

By JOHN FEFFER / IPS WRITER

WASHINGTON—After more than 15 years in the drafting, Burma unveiled its new constitution in February. The 194-page document has generated a widely disparate response.

In May, just days after Tropical Cyclone Nargis hit Burma and killed tens of thousands Burmese, the military government reported that 92 percent of the population supported the new constitution in a referendum vote.

The opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), however, has categorically rejected the new document. And outside observers generally treat the constitution—as well as the referendum results—with skepticism.

From the current Burmese military government's point of view, the constitution provides for a stable transition to democratic rule. Elections are scheduled for 2010, after which the new constitution would go into effect. The military has reserved 25 percent of the seats in both houses of parliament, but the remaining seats will be open to qualified candidates.

Some measure of autonomy is accorded to the states.

The third in Burma's history—after an initial 1947 post-colonial document inspired by British common law and a socialist-era document drafted by the military junta in 1974—the new constitution provides at least the trappings of the rule of law. For instance, the constitution mandates the creation of a constitutional court, which will administer and interpret the law as well as preside over disputes between different branches of government.

According to Dominic Nardi, a Georgetown University law student and speaker at an October 8 seminar in Washington, DC, sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, the court has a third critical function as an "elite insurance mechanism."

"If the political situation changes dramatically, if the opposition takes over one or both houses of legislation, a constitutional court ensures that minorities will have some protection under the law," says Nardi. "In transition from less liberal to more liberal forms of government, we see authoritarian leaders establish courts so that they have protection from prosecution after the transition."

The constitution also rules out demonetization. In 1987, the government introduced a new currency and wiped out the savings of millions of Burmese. The constitutional prohibition against demonetization is therefore a positive lesson learned, says David Steinberg, professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University.

At the same time, Steinberg notes that the constitution contains a get-out-of-jail-free card for the leadership: "No one can be tried for any crimes committed by the government in the past."

The military has protected its position in other ways. In an emergency, the president can hand power over to the military commander-in-chief for a year. Moreover, changing the constitution requires the consent of three-quarters of lawmakers. So it is quite difficult to change the army's leading role, the process of choosing the president or even the process of amendment itself.

Nardi points out, however, that the US constitution is also a notoriously difficult document to amend, so that US leaders have gotten around the amendment process by focusing on judicial appointments and constitutional interpretation.

"Many people think the amendment procedure is a horrible provision. I don't think it will matter as much as many people in the opposition believe," Nardi argues. Other provisions in the new constitution "allow the speaker and the president to appoint judges to a constitutional tribunal. If you can't amend the constitution, you could appoint judges more favorable to you and influence judicial interpretation."

Brian Joseph of the National Endowment for Democracy believes the constitution does nothing to advance democratic rights.

"The constitution drafting effort and the draft constitution offer us virtually nothing to hold on to," he says. "It may have some provisions that allow for protections or legislative action."

But the essential characteristic is that the military can dismiss the government without cause," Joseph added. "Whoever is governing, once they overstep their bounds, will be dismissed. So the government will constantly be looking over its shoulder."

Joseph does not believe that there will be any true power-sharing under the new constitutional order or any creation of space for the opposition. "They might hold elections in 2010," he observes. "The important thing is not the technical details of the constitution but whether people can organize, whether there's freedom of speech and mobilization. If parties can't organize, this is all just an empty exercise."

Joseph pointed out that opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi cannot run for president because she was once married to a foreigner, which disqualifies her according to a provision of the constitution.

Steinberg acknowledges that the military has no intention of undermining its own power and that the constitution will be a continuation of military rule by other means. At one time, in the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists looked to the military in developing countries as forward-looking and relatively immune from corruption. Today, however, perceptions of the military junta have changed.

"Maybe there will be some people within the military trying to change the operation of power under the constitution," he concludes. "But right now it is an unlikely possibility."

[MYANMAR: Every village should have one midwife - UNFPA official](#)

IRIN - 16 October 2008

WABOEGONE - Almost five months after Cyclone Nargis claimed five of her six children, Thein Thein faces having her seventh baby without any proper care.

Thein Thein, 38, has few safe delivery options as there is no midwife in her village, Waboegone, comprising 100 people in about 20 households, which can only be reached by a five-hour boat journey and a 30-minute walk.

[Pregnant women](#) in rural areas usually give birth at home with the help of a village midwife, who is rarely properly trained, or a health attendant from a local health centre.

A nurse from the nearest town - Pyinzalu in Labutta Township at the southern part of the Ayeyarwady Delta - comes to Waboegone village every month for maternal health services.

"I might need to go to the nearest town to deliver the baby as there is no midwife here," said Thein Thein.

Pregnant women in the hard-to-reach cyclone-hit area are among the most vulnerable of survivors of the category four storm that left 140,000 people either dead or missing and 2.4 million badly affected.

"Ideally, every village should have one midwife who is government trained for 18 months but one midwife has to cover five to 10 or more villages on average throughout the country," Thwe Thwe Win, the UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) national programme officer, told IRIN.

"The Ministry of Health seeks to fill the gap with Auxiliary Midwives [volunteers trained for six months]," she explained.

UNFPA has given drugs and reproductive health kits to local hospitals and health centres in the cyclone-affected area as well as providing funding support for in-service training for midwives.

The organisation has set up three maternal waiting homes in Bogalay, Labutta and Daydaye but pregnant women in hard-to-reach areas still face difficulties giving birth.

Mobile clinics

Win Mar lives two hours' walk from the nearest town – Pyinsalu. A health attendant lives in town and only comes once a month.

"If the health attendant is not here when it is time, I will have to go to Pyinsalu to give birth," Win Mar said.

"Because of difficult access and the need to travel so far, it is very difficult for these women to attain health services," Dan Baker, country representative for UNFPA, told IRIN in Yangon.

With doctors from the Myanmar Medical Association, UNFPA has set up mobile reproductive health teams to cover remote areas of the delta.

"We've been trying to cover remote areas with reproductive health teams, which set up a temporary clinic for a day or two where they can do pre-natal exams or address other health concerns," Baker said.

"Our idea is to get as close to people as possible. We've shown the donors that there is definitely a need and we can be effective in those areas ... now we need the money to make that happen."

Birth plan

Thwe Thwe Win suggested mobile health teams help women draw up a birth plan. "The health team usually visits a village at a time and they do a follow up [consultation] if necessary. Antenatal care alone is not enough. About 15 percent of pregnant women are likely to face difficulty when giving birth," she said.

"It is important for pregnant mothers to have a birth plan about where they want to deliver and how," said Thwe Thwe Win.

But both Thein Thein and Win Mar could not prepare much for the birth. "What can we prepare while Nargis left us only hands?" Win Mar asked.

As many of them are Christian, most of the assistance has come from Christian associations and they are still highly dependent on donations.

Fortunately both have husbands and other relatives left in the village.

Win Mar said: "They will carry me for two hours' walk using a blanket as a cradle between two bamboo poles when the time comes to go to Pyinsalu town for giving birth."

[Super Rats Invade; Blamed for Myanmar Famine: As Thousands Starve, Officials Seize Food Aid, Relief Groups Say](#)

ABC News - October 16, 2008

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to a report by activist Edith Mirante for the NGO Project Maje, India has responded by paying Indian citizens for every rat caught in regional villages, building rat-proof granaries, and building roads and helipads to access outlying villages so that food aid can be provided to needy citizens.

And although the Indian government and NGOs are providing food aid for the affected region there the Bangladeshi government has also received food aid and support from the United Nations World Food

Program for its maudam problem activists say no such relief is being provided to the Chin people by the Burmese government.

Aid that does make it to the Chin is, for the most part, coming in the form of 60-pound bags of donated rice from Western Christian groups. And even that is reportedly endangered.

Myanmar Officials Seizing Food Aid, Say Officials

The Chin Human Rights Organization reports that more than 450 bags of rice donated as food aid by the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the Province of Myanmar in April were confiscated by the Burmese government. The group says this rice was then sold at an overpriced rate so that the local authorities could make a profit.

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

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

"As long as we are taking care of the food problem that the generals of the Myanmar government would otherwise have to deal with themselves, we are fairly confident we can do this," Risley continued, saying that the government could end up constraining relief efforts. The U.N. is currently asking the U.S. and other countries to provide funding and support for the Chin.

The Chin Human Rights Organization and the U.S. Campaign for Burma believe at least \$1 million is needed for immediate assistance.

Experts estimate that the maudam will last between two and five years, and relief organizations say that a sustained relief effort will be needed to address a devastated Chin society.

The Chin people are an ethnic minority in Burma - one of the many minorities that the Myanmar government mistreats, according to human rights activists. To make matters worse, says Jeremy Woodrum of the U.S. Campaign for Burma, the Chin people are also Christians, forming a religious minority in the nation that the Myanmar government reportedly often abuses.

"The Burmese government is among the most brutal in the world, with twice as many mistreated villages than are in Darfur and the Sudan," said Woodrum. "Having a natural disaster wipe out the Chin people, a detested ethnic and religious minority, serves the Burmese regime's interest."

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

Kylie Sobel is a 2008 intern at ABC News. She attends Fordham University.

Two Names Tipped for Burma's post-2010 Presidency

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 15, 2008

By WAI MOE - Burma's ruling generals favor one of two candidates—a Than Shwe protégé and a hardline government minister—for the post of president after the 2010 election, according to intelligence sources.

A source within the government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) said members of the mass organization were discussing the chances of Lt-Gen Myint Swe, a protégé of Snr-Gen Than Shwe and his wife, and Minister of Industry-1 Aung Thaung.

"Aung Thaung is a strategic and influential player of the USDA, while Myint Swe is a favorite of the junta's head, Snr-Gen Than Shwe," the source said. They both had the potential to take on the task of president, he said.

Under the junta backed constitution, the president of Burma will be chosen by the parliament, a quarter of whose members will be appointed by the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw (Burma's armed forces) while the rest will be elected in the 2010 election.

The junta says the constitution was approved overwhelmingly in the referendum in May, although the claim is disputed by opposition forces within Burma and Western governments.

A Rangoon woman journalist said the names of Myint Swe and Aung Thaung also cropped up in teashop political discussion.

Myint Swe rose within the Tatmadaw to become commander of the Rangoon Regional Command in 2002, with the rank of major general.

Aung Thaung has been accused by Burmese dissident groups of being one of the masterminds behind the 2003 ambush of a convoy carrying democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Depayin, Sagaing Division in northern Burma. Human rights groups estimate that about 100 Suu Kyi supporters were killed by pro-government thugs.

Aung Thaung is also said to be one of the richest persons in Burma. His family runs at least three companies—Aung Yee Phyo Co, IGE Co Ltd and Queen Star Co— which are gaining footholds in oil, gas, agricultural products, timber and rice trading industries and the importation of computers and other electronic goods.

Meanwhile, a Rangoon researcher familiar with military affairs said Than Shwe, 75, is not ready to retire before the 2010 election and seems intent on maintaining his iron grip on the Tatmadaw.

The researcher said the two other members of the ruling junta, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye and Gen Shwe Mann, were also likely to remain at their posts if Than Shwe stayed in power.

[Myanmar lifts ban on some goods trading in border areas](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-16 11:50:53

YANGON -- Myanmar has lifted ban on some goods trading in the country's border areas with neighboring countries under a new policy of liberalizing the border trade, the local weekly 7-Day reported Thursday, quoting the Ministry of Commerce.

Of the 32 items of export goods prohibited before, rubber, sesame, sugarcane, rice, garlic, onion, chili, turmeric have been re-granted for trading across border.

Of the banned import goods previously, apple, pear, grape, cherry, sweet tamarind, palm have been permitted again for buying in, with sweet honey orange being limited to import only during non-harvesting season.

According to official figures, agricultural produces were Myanmar's second largest exports (1.14 billion U.S. dollars) after natural gas in the fiscal year 2007-08. The others are gem products, forest products and marine products.

Myanmar exported most to Asian countries and regions, having border trade with such neighboring countries as Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh.

Myanmar's foreign trade in 2007-08 stood at 8.851 billion U.S. dollars, of which the exports accounted for 6.043 billion dollars with agricultural produces contributing 18.8 percent of the total, while the imports represented 2.818 billion dollars registering a trade surplus of 3.225 billion dollars, statistics showed.

Of Myanmar's 11 leading exporting countries and region during the fiscal year, Thailand topped the list with 2.673 billion U.S. dollars, followed by India (719.45 million dollars), China's Hong Kong (649.43 million dollars), China (509.19 million dollars), Singapore (401 million dollars) and Japan (186.21 million dollars).

Myanmar's main export goods are natural gas, agricultural, marine, forestry and gem products, while its key import goods are machinery, crude oil, edible oil, pharmaceutical products, cement, fertilizer and consumers goods.

Myanmar's principal crops are paddy, beans and pulses, oil crops, cotton, sugarcane and culinary crops.

[Burma Campaign UK Urges Cotton Traders to Stop Trade](#)

Irrawaddy - Wednesday, October 15, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING

The London-based Burma Campaign UK has urged Cotton Traders—a British clothing company—to stop selling clothes made in Burma, saying clothing exports are a vital source of income that helps to keep the Burmese military government in power.

The latest campaign came after Burma Campaign UK supporters found two clothing items in the Cotton Traders 2008 catalogue with labels stating “Made in Myanmar,” according to the Burma Campaign UK.

Johnny Chatterton, a campaign officer, said, “Companies sourcing clothes from Burma are helping to fund a dictatorship that uses rape, torture and murder to oppress its own people.”

“Customers of Cotton Traders will be shocked to hear they are involved with this brutal dictatorship,” he said.

Chatterton said he did not know whether Cotton Traders actually has investments in Burma but said that two items of clothing—a trouser and a shirt—appeared to have been manufactured in Burma.

The group launched a boycott campaign on Wednesday against Cotton Traders, according to a statement.

In other Burma news, Zoya Phan, the international coordinator for Burma Campaign UK, is in Hungary to lobby the government to support stronger European Union sanctions on Burma, according to a statement released on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Myint Soe, the chairman of the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association, said Burma's vital garment industry could suffer factory closures and layoffs because orders are sharply down following the global financial crisis, according to an Associated Press report.

Myint Soe was quoted as saying, “Since the financial crisis, orders for new consignments have been reduced, and we will see a serious impact by the middle of December.”

He said the garment industry suffered a setback early this year when South Africa's biggest clothing retailer canceled orders, citing the Burmese military crackdown on anti-government demonstrations in September last year.

That drop off led to the closure of about 35 factories in Burma, he said. About 100 garment factories remain, employing 80,000 to 100,000 workers, compared to more than 270 factories before 2003.

According to official statistics, Burma earned US \$282 million from garment exports in the 2007-2008 fiscal year.

Many EU countries have imposed economic sanctions on Burma in recent years to urge it to move toward a more democratic government and to protect human rights. The US imposed bans on imports of clothing from Burma starting in 2003.

In late September at the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, Burma's Foreign Minister Nyan Win urged the international community to lift “unjustified” economic sanctions that hurt the development and progress of the country.

He said that unilateral economic sanctions are unwarranted and against international law. The sanctions are not only unfair but also immoral, he said, claiming sanctions are holding back Burma's contribution to the international community.

[New Dissident Trials in Burma](#)

Radio Free Asia - 2008-10-15

Dozens of dissidents and activists face closed trials in Burma, including a leading monk.

BANGKOK—The detained leader of the All Burmese Monk's Alliance, now on trial with 36 other dissidents in Burma, is ill and depressed and suffering from headaches and numbness in detention, according to one of his lawyers.

"He said he was pretty weak, and he had an IV drip. He didn't look good. He told me that if he concentrates on something or tries to think, he feels heavy and numb in his head," lawyer Khin Maung Shein said in an interview after meeting Ashin Gambira on Wednesday.

"Last Monday when I met him, from the way he talked to me, it was clear he was very depressed. I told him not to be disheartened and to try to stay healthy. He also said he is tired. Today he looked a bit better, but he further complained about numbness and pain in his head," he said.

Another lawyer representing Ashin Gambira, Aung Thein, resigned as counsel in one of the cases against him on Oct. 1, telling the court that it hadn't allow him to prepare a defense.

Aung Thein said he was permitted insufficient information about Gambira and 10 other defendants and wasn't given enough time to refute a 13-page filing by the prosecution.

Ashin Gambira—a major figure in the Saffron Revolution of September and October 2007—is charged with multiple offenses, including violating laws on immigration and associations. He was arrested Oct. 4 in Sagaing, in Mandalay division, after hiding for almost a year.

Closed trials

Closed trials began Monday in the former capital, Rangoon, of 37 political activists and dissidents on a range of charges. Among the defendants are several leaders of the 1988 student uprising against the junta.

Burmese sources said the trials are going on in different venues: in the notorious Insein prison and in courts in Hlaing Tharyar township and Kamaryut township.

The 1988 student activists are all being tried at Insein prison, with some 600 witnesses expected to testify, Burmese sources say. Defendants have received breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and remained in court without meals until the proceedings adjourn at 4 p.m.

Several sources close to the defendants meanwhile said that Ye Nyunt, a senior police officer assigned to prosecute Gambira, entertainer Zargana, and several of the student leaders, attempted suicide on Oct. 9 at his home.

Relatives of his clients have said he had become friendly with them and often apologized for prosecuting them. Three sources who asked not to be named said he remains in hospital under tight security.

Original reporting by Khin May Zaw and Tin Aung Khine, translated by Khin May Zaw for RFA's Burmese service. Burmese service director: Nancy Shwe. Executive producer: Susan Lavery. Written and produced in English by Sarah Jackson-Han.

[Lawyers, Families Complain as Trials Begin of 37 Activists](#)

Irrawaddy - Tuesday, October 14, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING - The trials began in Rangoon on Monday of 37 political activists charged with a series of offences, including threatening the stability of the government.

The one-day appearances were closed to the general public, including the families of the accused, who protested against their exclusion.

The accused include several leaders of the 88 Generation Students movement, including Min Ko Naing. His trial was adjourned until October 27.

The accused face seven charges, including a provision of the criminal code covering crimes judged to threaten the stability of the government.

The trials are taking place in three locations—Insein Prison and court premises in Hlaing Tharyar Township and Kamaryut Township.

The accused also include Nilar Thein, a woman activist, and a prominent activist monk, Ashin Gambira, who were among the leaders of the September 2007 demonstrations, Htun Htun Oo, Maung Maung Latt, Aung Kyaw Moe, Si Thu Maung and Tar Tar Thet.

Gambira is charged with nine separate criminal offenses, including infringements of State Offence Act 505 A and B, Immigration Act 13/1, Illegal Organization Act 17/1, Electronic Act 303 A and Organization Act 6.

Gambira's lawyer, Aung Thein, resigned his brief on October 1, complaining that he was not being allowed to prepare a proper defense

Another defense lawyer, Khin Maung Shein, said he would also resign his brief after the court refused to allow him to ask questions on behalf of his clients.

Both were asked by their clients to withdraw. "If we are asked by our clients to resign, then we have to [follow their instructions]," Khin Maung Shein said. "They asked us to resign not because they are not satisfied with our efforts but because they don't want to cooperate with the courts' schedule any longer."

Meanwhile, detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer, Kyi Win, said no reply had yet been received to the legal appeal against her continuing house arrest, which had been handed in at Naypyidaw on October 8.

Suu Kyi's latest five-year term of house arrest was extended in May for a further year—illegally, according to Kyi Win, because article 10 (b) of the Burmese State Protection Law 1975 stipulates that a person judged to be a "threat to the sovereignty and security of the State and the peace of the people" can only be detained for up to five years.

Suu Kyi has spent more than 13 years of the past 19 years confined to her Rangoon home.

[India-Myanmar trade and investment talks](#)

Asia News International (ANI) - 14 October 2008

New Delhi - Union Minister of State for Commerce and Power Jairam Ramesh is heading an official delegation for trade and investment talks with the Government of Myanmar in Mandalay at Myanmar today.

During the talks, Ramesh will take up the issue of expanding trade centres along the 1600-kms India-Myanmar border.

At present, Moreh in Manipur is the only operational trade centre on the border. India will propose two additional such centres-Avangkhu in Nagaland and Zowkhathar in Mizoram which is also a long-standing demand of these two states.

In addition, India will propose an expansion of items to be traded with a view to move towards normal free trade very soon at these centres. India is also expected to reiterate its offer to include Myanmar in the duty free tariff preference scheme announced by it for LDCs.

The details of the financing mechanism to facilitate expanded bilateral trade will be also be firmed up during the Mandalay talks. UBI has already signed an agreement with the Foreign Trade Bank of Myanmar for establishing such a mechanism.

Myanmar will be the beneficiary of the Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) with The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to be signed by India and ASEAN in Bangkok, later this year. Myanmar is also a member of Bay of Bengal Multisectoral Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) agreement involving Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.

India is hosting the BIMSTEC Summit in New Delhi in mid-November 2008. India's exports to Myanmar in 2007/08 amounted to about 185 million dollars, while its imports from Myanmar were valued at around 810 million dollars.

On October 16, the Myanmar Prime Minister and Ramesh will inaugurate a Centre for Enhancement of IT Skills established at Yangon with Indian assistance of two million dollars.

This Centre, to be run by Indian professionals, is equipped to train 1000 youth every year initially who will be awarded a diploma of the Pune-based Centre for the Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) which is an institution under the Ministry of Information Technology. (ANI)

Mizzima websites down for several days due to hacking attempts

SEAPA (South East Asian Press Alliance) - 15 October 2008

Source: Mizzima News

The websites of Mizzima News, an independent Burmese multi-media group based in New Delhi, were suspended by its hosting server on the evening of October 9 because the site had attracted several hacking attempts. They became fully operational only on October 14.

Mizzima's Canada-based hosting company, Hostpapa.ca, said it suspended the sites – <http://mizzima.com> , <http://mizimaburmese.com> , <http://mizzima.tv> , and <http://mizzimaphoto.com> – because the said attacks might also harm other sites on the server. According to Mizzima's technical staff, the hacking attempts were sophisticated, well-timed and organized. The hacking file used has more than 4,000 lines of code and was adapted from a popular PHP Shell script, the technical staff added.

"Unfortunately, to protect the servers and the other customers on your server, we had to suspend your account," said Hostpapa's technical support staff in its notice to Mizzima. While it is still difficult to trace who is behind the hacking operations, Mizzima's technical staff said they found the main attempt to have originated from Russia, with cooperation from other hackers in Germany, France and India.

"This kind of well-organized attacking can't be done by individuals but is instead the disguised actions of an institution, most probably in this case the military regime," said Sein Win, Mizzima's managing editor.

Burma's military junta, which has sent several IT specialists for further training in Russia and other parts of the world, has imposed a ban on Mizzima's websites inside the country.

Though web users could still access the Mizzima sites by bypassing the government's Internet filtering systems through the help of proxy servers, the junta made it an offense to surf the site and users who are caught doing so are made to pay a heavy penalty.

The junta always blamed exiled media groups as well as foreign broadcasting radio stations for disseminating information on human rights violations inside Burma as well as the continued mismanagement of the country.

In its campaign against foreign broadcasting stations after the September 2007 protests, the junta, through its mouthpiece, New Light of Myanmar, carried slogans that stated: "Skyful of liars attempting to destroy nation, BBC lying, VOA deceiving, RFA setting up hostilities. Beware don't be bought by those ill-wishers," referring to the services of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

This is the second instance that Mizzima's sites have been the target of hackers. In July, Mizzima websites were crippled due to a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack.

In the same month, the website of the Oslo-based Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) sustained a similar DDoS attack. In September, DVB, along with two other websites of exiled Burmese media groups—the Chiang Mai-based "Irrawaddy" and Bangkok-based "New Era Journal"—also came under DDoS attack, rendering their sites inaccessible on September 24, two days before the Saffron Revolution's first anniversary.

Mizzima News Agency, run by Burmese journalists, is an independent Burmese multi-media group focusing on Burma and Burma-related news and issues, and maintains four different websites.

Besides offering updated daily news both in English and Burmese, Mizzima also podcasts video stories on its <http://mizzima.tv> site, stories which are frequently picked up by other news organizations.

Mizzima, as a member of the international media watchdog International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX), and as a partner of the regional media watchdog Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), has been producing media alerts on the violations of freedom of expression in Burma for over a decade.

Mizzima News (<http://www.mizzima.com/>) is a news organization headquartered in New Delhi, India, run by exiled Burmese journalists. A SEAPA partner, it aims to promote awareness about the situation in Burma and promote democracy and freedom of expression in the country.

[Brisk trade in tiger parts in Myanmar, says WWF](#)

AFP – 15 October 2008

PARIS — Skins, claws and bones from at least 1,158 tigers and other protected big cats have been spotted in open markets in Myanmar during surveys conducted over the last 18 years, according to a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report.

More than half came from five species banned from international trade, among them four species listed at threatened with extinction.

The tally included more than 100 tigers, whose numbers in the wild have dwindled to a few thousand worldwide, according to conservation experts.

"This can only be the tip of the iceberg," said Chris Shepherd, who coordinated the investigation carried out by TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network supported by WWF.

"The cats were openly displayed for sale and the dealers quite frank about the illegality of the trade, which suggests a serious lack of law enforcement," he said in a statement.

Three of four markets monitored in a dozen surveys -- the most recent in late 2006 -- are located on borders with China and Thailand, with prices quoted in Chinese yuan, Thai baht and US dollars.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is plagued with corruption, and was ranked in September as one of the world's two most corrupt nations by watchdog group Transparency International.

Yangon is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and thus is legally bound by its provisions.

"The sale of endangered cat parts ... is an appalling and brazen violation of the law in Myanmar and should not be tolerated," said Susan Lieberman, director of the WWF's wildlife programme.

"Most of these species have very low population numbers and will not be able to withstand the amount of poaching that is feeding this trade."

Parts of rare mammals -- especially the penis and bones -- are used in traditional Chinese medicine to enhance sexual potency or health.

Four of the big cats whose parts were for sale figure on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List as threatened with extinction: the tiger, the clouded leopard, the marbled cat and the Asiatic golden cat.

Along with a fifth, the leopard, they are all banned from international trade by CITES.

While most of the specimens from these five species were found in surveys during the 1990s, more than 120 turned up after 2000, showing that the illegal trade is still going strong, the report concluded.

[Myanmar removes tainted milk products from shelves](#)

AFP – 14 October 2008

YANGON — Myanmar authorities said Tuesday they had removed seven imported dairy products from store shelves -- one of them from China -- after they were found to contain traces of melamine.

An official statement in the state press did not specify where all of the products had been made but at least one came from China, where four children have died and at least 53,000 fell ill from melamine-tainted milk products.

The announcement came just days after nine Chinese products were banned from Myanmar store shelves.

"Importation, processing, distribution and using... milk powder contaminated with melamine that is unfit for human consumption are hereby prohibited," the statement in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The health and industry ministries will continue to test all imported dairy products for traces of the industrial chemical, it said.

Myanmar's food and drug watchdog had already destroyed 16 tonnes of imported Chinese baby formula, and authorities had urged people not use Chinese milk and dairy products because of the widespread tainted milk scandal.

Vietnam has complained to Indonesia of possible melamine contamination in Indonesian-made biscuits, a report said Tuesday.

Vietnamese authorities informed Indonesia's embassy in Hanoi that Indonesian-made Khong Guan biscuits could be tainted with the chemical, Trade Ministry Director Subagyo was quoted as saying by the Antara news agency.

Indonesia's food and drug monitoring agency has been ordered to probe the issue, Subagyo said.

"Based on the results of our own tests the product is not contaminated with melamine," food and drug agency chairman Husniah Rubiana Thamrin Akib was quoted as saying.

Khong Guan biscuits had already been tested in Indonesian and Vietnamese laboratories and had come up negative for melamine, usually used in making plastics, she said.

"Our products are safe because we import milk from Europe, Australia and New Zealand," Akib said.

Indonesia ordered food producers to avoid using Chinese-made milk products in September after four Chinese children died and at least 53,000 fell ill from drinking milk or milk products laced with melamine.

Some manufacturers had been using the chemical to make watered-down milk appear to have a higher protein content.

An array of China-made foods and drinks have been removed from store shelves around the world since the contamination first came to light last month.

[Britain pledges to do all it can for Burma](#)

Mizzima - Monday, 13 October 2008 21:36

by Mungpi & Solomon - New Delhi - The British government has pledged it will do all it can to help usher in democracy in Burma. This was in response to an online petition submitted by campaigners in United Kingdom.

The British government's response to the petition, which is posted on the Prime Minister's website (<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page17117>), said the political situation in Burma has continued to be a priority for the Government and the Prime Minister personally over the last 12 months. It pledged that it will do all it can to help the people of Burma.

"The Government will continue to do all it can to help the people of Burma achieve the peaceful, prosperous and democratic future they deserve," the response said.

The Government was responding to an online petition launched by the Burma Campaign UK in the wake of the brutal suppression of peaceful protesters in September 2007 by Burma's military rulers.

The response, posted on October 9, also extended the Government's concern over the Burmese peoples' plight, who not only endure continued oppression at the hands of the military regime, but also faced the

devastating impact of Cyclone Nargis, which lashed the country in May, killing tens of thousands and devastated more than 2.4 million lives.

The online petition signed by more than 5,000 people congratulated the British Government for continuously supporting the Burmese democracy movement but urged Prime Minister Gordon Brown to personally engage world leaders on the issue of Burma and set a time frame and benchmarks for change.

"We call on the Prime Minister to set benchmarks and timelines for change in Burma, after which, if no progress has been made, steps will be taken to increase political and economic pressure on the regime," the petition said.

Meanwhile, a Burmese human rights activist, Zoya Phan, on Monday highlighted the sufferings of Burmese people under the repressive rule during her talk at the 12th annual Forum 2000 Conference being held in Prague, in the Czech Republic.

Zoya Phan, International Coordinator of the BCUK, who is attending the conference being held from October 12 to 14, said she was able to make a great number of people aware on the situation in Burma.

"A lot of people don't know about Burma, after my speech they came to me and asked about the country," Phan said.

Phan is on a lobbying trip to the Czech Republic and is one of the speakers at the conference which is being attended by senior politicians from all over the world, including former Presidents, Prime Ministers, and opposition leaders from Russia, Zimbabwe and other countries with terrible human rights records.

"Still most people in European countries don't know what is going on there [in Burma] and governments are still doing business with the regime, while they are not giving enough humanitarian assistance [to the Burmese people]," Mark Farmaner, Director of the BCUK said.

Zoya Phan is the daughter of the deceased Pado Mahn Shar La Phan, leader of ethnic Karen rebels, Karen National Union, and is currently residing in UK, where she is actively involved in campaigning and lobbying on the issue of Burma.

[CONTRIBUTOR: The Intricacies of Ban's Role in Burma](#)

Irrawaddy - Tuesday, October 14, 2008

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Last month, Ban convened a "high-level" meeting of the Group of Friends. The Security Council reported: "The members of the Group expressed continued support for the Secretary-General's Good Offices and

encouraged Myanmar to use this channel to address key issues of concern to the international community.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nehginpao Kipgen is the general secretary of US-based Kuki International Forum and a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Burma (1947-2004).

[Local officials learn how to raise awareness about bird flu in Myanmar](#)

Unicef - 13 October 2008

By Sandar Linn - NYAUNG SHWE, Myanmar, – More than 60 health and livestock professionals are now ready to implement their communication workplan on avian influenza, which was drafted during a recent three-day training session held in Nyaung Shwe Township, Shan State.

The plan aims to make a significance contribution towards combating the threat of bird flu here in an area that is at high risk for a potential outbreak. Nyaung Shwe is close to a wetland wildlife sanctuary located on a major north-south migration path for birds.

Improving communication skills

The training was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, the Ministry of Health, local authorities and UNICEF to equip front frontline communicators with skills in disseminating avian influenza messages to families and community members.

UNICEF has been designated as UN focal point for avian influenza risk communication, and the Government of Japan has provided financial support of \$1.9 million for this communication effort.

In March 2006, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries reported the first outbreak of the disease among chickens in central Myanmar. On 18 November 2007, the country saw its first reported human case in a seven-year-old girl.

‘Preventive messages’

"This training is very important, because I learned a lot on communication approaches that I was not aware of before," said one of the participants, livestock official Than Naing Soe, adding that he already had technical knowledge about avian influenza but did not have expertise in communications.

"The training gives us the opportunity for the best combination of our professional and communication skill, which will result in delivering preventive messages effectively to the community," he noted.

At the training session, participants learned essential communication skills through active group discussion and role playing.

Access to information

Following the training, an awareness-raising presentation on prevention of avian and pandemic influenza was held at the heart of the Inle wetland. More than 400 people attended.

Such public talks significantly enhance the dissemination of prevention messages to communities. Posters in local ethnic languages, pamphlets, booklets for children, and TV and radio spots on key messages have also been produced and distributed to help prevent bird flu in Myanmar.

The need for such measures is clear: According to a 2006 study on poultry rearing and other practices pertaining to avian influenza, 65 per cent of respondents in Myanmar lacked access to information about the disease and how to prevent it.

Myanmar: Children of the cyclone

IFRC - 13 Oct 2008 10:50:00 GMT

By Lasse Norgaard, Regional Information Delegate, Bangkok

Cyclone Nargis left hundreds of children orphaned and vulnerable. These are the stories of Htoo and Pont Pont.

Saw Kay Htoo

You could be forgiven for thinking that Saw Kay Htoo is just like any other 11-year-old boy. Walking home from school with a beaming smile and chatting with his classmates, there are no obvious signs of the tragedy he has lived through.

Home, however, is the child protection centre in Labutta, where seven orphans live together. They all lost their parents during the cyclone almost five months ago. Three of the smaller children are from the same family, but Saw Kay Htoo is alone.

Htoo lost his parents and ten siblings when Cyclone Nargis ravaged the Ayeyarwaddy Delta that fateful night in May. His family tried to escape the cyclone in their boat, but the boat was dashed to pieces by the waves. He saw his parents and siblings disappear one by one during the night. Htoo managed to survive by holding on to some wreckage until he landed on higher ground.

Sitting on a chair in the child protection centre, you can sense the sadness in Htoo's eyes, but it will take a psychologist to treat the underlying trauma. Fortunately, Htoo has been surrounded by committed and caring volunteers from the Myanmar Red Cross Society, who run the centre with support from UNICEF.

Volunteers

Since the cyclone struck, the volunteers have taken turns looking after the children, preparing their meals, helping them with homework and organizing plays when possible. Now a more systematic psychosocial support programme is being implemented as the whole operation gradually moves from relief to recovery.

So far, 25 volunteers from the Myanmar Red Cross Society have been trained in psychosocial counselling, and they in turn will train their peers. The training will target community leaders, teachers, monks and other groups, and it is designed to help the healing process as the children deal with their trauma and loss. Htoo and the other children from the centre, together with 443 orphans from the area around Labutta, are all in need of this psychosocial support.

Pont Pont

Children like Pont Pont are simply happy to be alive. Pont Pont is 15 years old and she wears purple grips in her hair, and her face is decorated and protected with thanaka (a traditional cosmetic paste). The wind blew away her family's home and her parents were swept away by the floodwater. Pont Pont was rescued by a group of people who managed to take refuge on higher ground. Using a map pinned to the wall of the Red Cross office in Labutta, Pont Pont was able to point out the location of her parents' house.

Eleven days later, Red Cross volunteers were able to locate her parents, who amazingly were alive, and they arranged a family reunion. Pont Pont's family had survived the disaster. Pont Pont's gratitude for the help she received from the Red Cross led her to enrol as a volunteer, so that she too can help other vulnerable people.

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

Source: [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\) - Switzerland](#)

Website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

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.

[Seven killed in Myanmar bus explosion: police](#)

AFP – 13 October 2008

YANGON — Seven passengers were killed and one was injured when a bus exploded in Myanmar's main city Yangon early Monday morning, a police official said.

The blast occurred at 2:30 am (Sunday 2000 GMT) as the bus headed north through the city, said the police official who did not wish to be named.

The official said the explosion had been caused by a faulty re-fitting of the bus to run on cheaper natural gas instead of petrol, a common practice in impoverished Myanmar.

Myanmar has also been hit by a spate of bombings which authorities have mostly blamed on armed exile groups, but when a bus explosion at a busy Yangon intersection last month and injured three passengers, officials did not say whether it was caused by a bomb.

State-run media has also begun blaming blasts on democracy activists, accusing two members of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) of bombing pro-government offices in July.

The NLD won a landslide victory in elections in 1990, but the junta never allowed it to take office and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest almost continuously since.

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962, partly justifying its grip on power by claiming the need to fend off ethnic rebellions.

[Myanmar inks energy deal with Thailand, Singapore: report](#)

AFP – 12 October 2008

YANGON — Myanmar has signed an agreement with Thai and Singaporean companies to provide the two energy-hungry nations with electricity from a hydro-power project, state media reported Sunday.

The project in southern Myanmar will generate 600 megawatts of electricity, the New Light of Myanmar said, and the deal was signed on Thursday in the reclusive nation's new capital Naypyidaw.

No further detail was given.

Myanmar, which has been ruled by the military since 1962, is under sanctions by the United States and Europe because of its human rights record and long-running detention of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

But the impact of the sanctions has been weakened as neighbours such as China, India and Thailand spend billions of dollars for a share of Myanmar's energy resources to solve energy problems at home.

[India will seek two more border trade centres with Myanmar](#)

The Hindu – 12 October 2008

New Delhi (PTI): India will seek two more border trade centres with Myanmar in the North-eastern states of Manipur and Mizoram but Arunachal Pradesh will be kept out of the proposal owing to security reasons.

The issue will be taken up by Minister of State for Commerce and Power Jairam Ramesh at Mandalay in Myanmar during his two-day visit from Tuesday.

At present, Moreh in Manipur is the only operational trade centre on the border. India will propose two additional such centres -- Avangkhu in Nagaland and Zowkhathar side.

"However, border trade centres in Arunachal Pradesh are not under discussion because of security and other considerations on the Indian side," an official statement said.

The Minister will also propose an expansion of items to be traded with a view to move towards normal free trade very soon at these centres. India will also reiterate its offer to include Myanmar in the duty free tariff preference scheme announced by it for LDCs. The details of the financing mechanism to facilitate expanded bilateral trade will also be firmed up during the Mandalay talks.

In his two previous visits earlier this year, apart from the bilateral investment promotion and protection agreement, pacts were signed for a USD 60 million line of credit from India to Myanmar for power transmission to be executed by the Power Grid Corporation of India and another USD 60 million line of credit for a 111 mw hydel power project to be executed by BHEL.

[Myanmar, Japan NGOs to jointly reconserve mangrove in cyclone-hit areas](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-13 09:43:17

YANGON -- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of Myanmar and Japan will cooperate in mangrove reconservation project in Myanmar's cyclone-hit areas, the local weekly Flower News reported Monday.

The four-year project (2009-2013), in which the Myanmar Forest Resources Environmental Development Association (FREDA) will cooperate with a Japanese NGO, is to grow 750 hectares of mangrove.

The two organizations had grown 1,215 hectares of mangrove in the country 10 years ago.

Earlier, two other non-governmental organizations of Myanmar and France have agreed to cooperate in such mangrove work in the region, according to local report.

The project in Bogalay and Ahmar in Ayeyawaddy delta, which will last for three years, includes dissemination of knowledge to local people.

Besides, another environment-conservation-related organization of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has also proposed to help Myanmar carry out such reconservation work on Mingmahlagyun sanctuary similarly damaged by the cyclone storm in May this year.

The Mingmahlagyun sanctuary in the Bogalay township is among the six sanctuaries and national parks in Myanmar recognized as ASEAN heritage parks.

Reports said Myanmar will regrow 20,250 hectares of mangrove in the Meinmahlagyun village to resist cyclone attack in the future.

Meinmahlagyun had about 40,500 hectares of mangrove before being hit by the severe storm, of which 30 percent were destroyed during the storm.

Noting that mangrove can mitigate the impact of cyclone storm, Myanmar has stressed the preservation of mangrove, calling on people to place emphasis to regrow such plantations after disaster.

Despite destruction of some mangrove in the delta region during the May cyclone storm, it had been able to prevent some villages from inflicting casualties as it was able to bring down the speed of the tidal wave, enabling most of the villagers there to escape from deaths, reports said.

Deadly tropical cyclone Nargis, which occurred over the Bay of Bengal, hit five divisions and states -- Ayeyawaddy, Yangon, Bago, Mon and Kayin on last May 2 and 3, of which Ayeyawaddy and Yangon inflicted the heaviest casualties and massive infrastructural damage.

The storm has killed 84,537 people and left 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured according to official death toll.

Myanmar arrests 398 drug traffickers in September

AFP/Daily Times – 11 October 2008

YANGON: Myanmar authorities arrested nearly 400 drugs traffickers in September as part of their crackdown on the narcotics trade, state media reported Friday.

The military-ruled nation insists it is on track to be drug-free by 2014 but for now remains the world's second-largest opium producer. "Action was taken against 398 people – 300 men and 98 women – in 253 cases," the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

Police, customs and military seized more than 400 kilograms (around 900 pounds) of opium, over seven kilograms of heroin, around 290 kilograms of low-grade opium and nearly 90,000 stimulant tablets, the paper said.

The United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime has said opium production in Myanmar shot up 46 percent from 2006 to 2007, blaming high-level collusion and corruption for the rise. Myanmar's mountainous and lawless border regions once hid vast poppy fields which supplied most of the world's opium 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.

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 say.

Appeal against Suu Kyi's Detention Handed in at Naypyidaw

Irrawaddy - Thursday, October 9, 2008

A legal representative of Burma's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi handed in to the military government in Naypyidaw on Wednesday a formal appeal against the latest extension of her house arrest.

Suu Kyi's lawyer, Kyi Win, told *The Irrawaddy* on Thursday that the appeal had been handed in personally by his assistant, Hla Myo Myint.

The government had given no indication when the appeal would be heard in court, Kyi Win said. "But we are hoping for a positive outcome."

Suu Kyi's latest five-year term of house arrest was extended in May for a further year—illegally, according to Kyi Win, because article 10 (b) of the Burmese State Protection Law 1975 stipulates that a person judged to be a "threat to the sovereignty and security of the State and the peace of the people" can only be detained for up to five years.

Suu Kyi has spent more than 13 years of the past 19 years confined to her Rangoon home.

Kyi Win said he planned to meet Suu Kyi soon to discuss the appeal.

Suu Kyi has reportedly been in poor health recently. She refused for about one month to accept deliveries of food and other household supplies at her home in what was seen as a protest against her continuing house arrest. Last week, she was visited by an eye specialist, Dr Kan Nyunt, and her personal physician, Dr Tin Myo Win.

At a Geneva press conference earlier this month, a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights official, Navanethem Pillay, expressed concern about Suu Kyi's continuing detention and urged the regime to free her and all other political prisoners.

Suu Kyi had "in fact served a sentence that far exceeds that served by many hardened criminals," Pillay said.

Pillay welcomed the recent release of seven political prisoners, but said it was a very small step when more than 2,000 political activists were still detained. "I urge the government to release them all as soon as possible," she said.

[Myanmar offers natural gas to Bangladesh –official](#)

Reuters - Wed Oct 8, 2008 5:20pm IST

DHAKA - Myanmar agreed on Wednesday to supply natural gas to neighbouring Bangladesh to help it produce fertiliser for use in both countries, a Bangladesh energy official said.

Gas is a raw material for making chemical fertiliser, including urea. Bangladesh's annual demand for urea is nearly 2.8 million tonnes, of which it produces 1.8 million tonnes while importing the rest.

"They have agreed to supply gas to us for producing fertiliser," Jalal Ahmed, chairman of the state-run Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation, said after a meeting in Dhaka with Myanmar's energy minister, Lun Thi.

"By offering to make urea which Yangon will partly buy back, Bangladesh will also benefit," Jalal told Reuters, adding that Myanmar had large gas reserves near its 320-km (200-mile) border with Bangladesh.

The gas is to be supplied via a pipeline straddling the border, which will be funded by Bangladesh, he said.

Bangladesh and Myanmar are major producers of rice, a staple food of their populations, but have to depend largely on imported fertiliser to help grow the crops required.

Bangladesh will set up a factory in its Chittagong region near the Myanmar border, with an annual production capacity of 600,000 tonnes of urea, using up to 200 million cubic feet of gas each day, officials said.

The promised gas supply for Bangladesh will have to wait until December, when a new field is due to be explored, said the Myanmar minister, whose military-ruled country supplies gas to China and India.

Later the minister discussed demarcating the two countries' maritime boundary with Bangladesh's energy adviser M. Tamim, who said Yangon would not object to Bangladesh's bidding process for hydrocarbon exploration in the Bay of Bengal.

"The minister assured us that his country will not raise any objection regarding Bangladesh's offshore bidding process in the Bay of Bengal," Tamim said.

Bangladesh floated tenders on Feb. 15 for exploration in the bay and seven firms have submitted 22 bidding documents to search for gas and oil in 15 offshore blocks, officials said.

Both India and Myanmar objected, saying some of the blocks were disputed. (Reporting by Serajul Islam Quadir, editing by Anthony Barker)

[Myanmar agrees to move forward hydropower plant proposal](#)

Xinhua - 2008-10-09 00:45:42

DHAKA -- Visiting Myanmar high official Wednesday agreed to move forward a Bangladesh proposal to set up a hydro power plant project in Myanmar from which Bangladesh will get electricity.

This came during the meeting here between Myanmar Energy Minister Brig General Lun Thi and his counterpart, the Bangladesh caretaker government Chief Adviser's Special Assistant for Power and Energy Ministry M Tamim.

As per the proposal, Bangladesh will build up the plant in Myanmar at its own cost and get 70 percent of the electricity from the project while Myanmar will get 30 percent as royalty.

Tamim after the meeting told reporters that the neighboring country's minister assured him of taking necessary steps to move forward the scheme.

The hydropower-project proposal was initiated by Bangladesh about two years ago. Both sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement the project.

As a follow-up step, Bangladesh offered to conduct a joint visit to select a project site in the Rakhine state of Myanmar about six months ago.

Tamim said the Myanmar side Wednesday agreed to conduct the joint visit by experts to select project site. "We've urged the Myanmar minister to expedite the move," he said.

[Myanmar: UN expert outlines steps for improving human rights](#)

UN News Centre - 8 October 2008

Improving the situation of human rights in Myanmar is still a challenging task, according to the independent United Nations expert on the issue, who has outlined a series of measures for the South-East Asian as it proceeds with its "road map to democracy" announced earlier this year.

"Respect for international human rights standards is indispensable in paving the road to democracy," Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, writes in a report released today.

"Myanmar is going through a unique moment in its political history," he says, noting that the country's new Constitution was finalized in February and adopted through a referendum in May. "The next step in the road map for national reconciliation and democratic transition is the election in 2010."

He stresses that if those general elections are prepared and conducted in an atmosphere in which human rights are fully respected, "the process will be credible, resulting in progressive achievement of democratic values."

Mr. Quintana proposes four core human rights elements to be completed by the Government before the 2010 elections. The first is to review and amend those domestic laws which limit fundamental rights – such as freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association – and contravene the new Constitution and international human rights standards.

"The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, as well as the right to freedom of opinion and expression, are fundamental rights to be respected in the process towards the establishment of a solid and reliable democracy," stated the Special Rapporteur.

"However, full enjoyment of those rights remains outstanding in Myanmar, according to reliable reports on the extension of detentions and/or new arrests of political activists."

Mr. Quintana proposes the progressive release of prisoners of conscience, of which there are more than 2,000 detained in different facilities around the country.

"Without the free participation of prisoners of conscience, the very credibility of the general elections of 2010 would be at stake," he stressed, adding that prisoner release would also reduce tension and inspire political participation.

Last month the Myanmar authorities freed several detainees as part of an amnesty procedure, including the country's longest-serving political prisoner, U Win Tin, and six other senior members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), whose leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest.

Mr. Quintana had welcomed the move, saying he hoped it "would be the first in a series of releases of other prisoners of conscience."

The transition to multi-party democratic and civil government, as planned by the new Constitution, will require "an intensive process of incorporating democratic values," the Special Rapporteur notes.

Among the measures the Government should adopt are repealing discriminatory legislation, continuing efforts to respond to the aftermath of the deadly cyclone that struck the country in early May, and avoiding the recruitment of child soldiers.

He also suggests a number of changes for the country's judiciary, which currently "is not independent and is under the direct control of the Government and the military." Proposed measures include guaranteeing due process, exercising full independence and impartiality and setting up mechanisms to investigate human rights abuses.

Mr. Quintana, who took up his post in May 2007, serves in an independent and unpaid capacity and reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, as do all Special Rapporteurs.

Asean Must Do More on Burma: Rice

Irrawaddy - Thursday, October 9, 2008

By LALIT K JHA / WASHINGTON US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Wednesday said the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) should do more to help move Burma's military dictatorship toward democracy.

"The democracies in places like Asean have to do more on Burma," Rice said in Washington in a speech delivered before a State Department advisory committee on the promotion of democracy.

Her remarks were one of the rare times a top US official has directly criticized the way Asean-member countries have handled the issue of Burma when it comes to promoting restoration of democracy and protection of human rights.

Pro-democracy advocates say Asean is in a position to do more for the people of Burma to help in reaching the objectives set by the international community—restoration of a true democracy in a peaceful transition.

Critics of Asean say several members of the regional grouping take the side of the military junta and are instrumental in supporting the regime.

In her speech, Rice said the task of promoting democracy in the world is not that of the US alone, and it should be shared by other responsible countries as well.

"Democracy promotion has got to be more than an American—an American task. The rest of the world, the EU, has got to do more on this, particularly in places like Cuba," she said.

"That's something that we're continuing to press for. A breath of fresh air in NATO and in the European Union has been the former captive nations, which take it as a part of their agenda to do democracy promotion," Rice said.

"So I think the next big frontier is to get more international support for this agenda. And it was a good thing that the UN did a Democracy Fund. That's a very good thing," she said.

In her speech, Rice identified Burma as one of the few countries in the world where the government does not welcome US ideas.

"You have other countries, such as, obviously, countries with which we have very bad relations—Burma or Cuba, Iran, even increasingly Russia—where the governments are not welcoming to what we do and you operate under a lot of constraints," Rice said.

Indonesia to ratify ASEAN charter: foreign ministry

AFP – 8 October 2008

JAKARTA — Indonesia is to sign up to a regional charter committing Southeast Asian nations to the principles of democracy and human rights despite doubts over its implementation, an official said Wednesday.

After lengthy debate the ASEAN charter should be ratified next week, foreign ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said.

Indonesia is the last member of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that has not ratified the charter, after the Philippines signed up on Tuesday.

ASEAN consists of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Faizasyah said the charter would strengthen the regional bloc, often dismissed as a talking shop which fails to confront human rights abuses in member countries like military-ruled Myanmar.

Myanmar's ratification earlier this year and the lack of any mechanism to sanction non-compliant members were among the reasons Indonesian lawmakers were slow to agree, he said.

"At first, we felt that if countries like Myanmar are not obliged to comply with what they sign, then ratifying the charter would be worthless," Faizasyah said.

"But Myanmar's ratification is progress. We're counting on Myanmar to gradually comply with the charter."

ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan said that with the Philippines on board and Indonesia about to sign, the charter was well on its way to becoming a reality by the ASEAN summit in Bangkok in December.

"We now have just one more Member State -- Indonesia -- to go before the charter is fully ratified and I am very optimistic that we will get full ratification by the 14th ASEAN Summit in December," he said in a statement.

"In fact, I am fervently anticipating that we will be able to celebrate the entry into force of the ASEAN charter at the summit."

The charter requires ASEAN to uphold broad ideals of democracy and human rights and envisages the creation of a massive free trade zone by 2015.

But it lacks sanctions that can act as a deterrent against human rights abuses by rogue members such as Myanmar's military junta, human rights campaigner Rafendi Djamin said.

"For example, if there is a problem in Myanmar, like an allegation of human rights abuses, it becomes a political issue. For the charter to be effective, there needs to be a dispute settlement mechanism," he said.

Adreas Pereira, a lawmaker from the opposition Democratic Party for Struggle, said he hoped the charter would eventually include measures to guarantee human rights.

"We hope that the Indonesian government will struggle to make an amendment concerning this matter," he said.

"There must be a concrete measure to settle this but it's difficult due to the non-interference agreement among ASEAN members."

In the Philippines, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel, who voted against the ratification, said the charter was a "sham" since it gave ASEAN no power to deal with rogue regimes like Myanmar's.

Labor rights activist Su Su Nway stages prison protest

Irrawaddy – 08 October 2008

Jailed Burmese labor rights activist Su Su Nway is refusing to accept medical treatment in protest at not being allowed to be treated outside prison, according to her sister.

Htay Htay Kyi said her sister, who was imprisoned in November 2007, also refused to attend a scheduled court session in Rangoon's Insein prison on Wednesday. Her lawyer, Khin Htay Kywe, said her non-appearance was also a gesture of protest.

Htay Htay Kyi said the authorities had prevented her from visiting her sister for more than two months after she visited the Rangoon office of the International Labor Organization (ILO) to report on Su Su Nway's deteriorating health.

Su Su Nway suffers from heart trouble and hypertension and was now experiencing glandular problems, Htay Htay Kyi said.

Su Su Nway, a member of the opposition National League for Democracy, was arrested after participating in a demonstration in November 2007 and charged with "threatening the stability of the government," under articles 124, 130 and 505 of the penal code.

In 2006, she was awarded the John Humphrey Freedom Award for her work in promoting labor rights.

Htay Htay Kyi said the Insein prison court rescheduled Su Su Nway's appearance for next Wednesday.

Burma: government bans five educational newspapers

Reporters Without Borders – 9 October 2008

Reporters Without Borders and the Burma Media Association condemn an education ministry ban on five educational newspapers - Educator, Prime, Digital Way, Nyein and Pain Daing. The ministry has not explained why it issued the ban, which has dismayed parents and teachers as these publications helped to make up for the lack of didactic material in state schools.

Burmese tourism industry suffers from US financial crisis

Mizzima - Thursday, 09 October 2008 10:58

by Zar Ni - Chiang Mai – An already struggling Burmese tourism industry is now facing additional hardship on the heels of the global economy's downward spiral sparked by the United States financial crisis.

Tourism to Burma had already fallen sharply since the 2007 Saffron Revolution and in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in May, but the current global financial crisis has brought the industry to a new low.

"Fist September unrest, then Cyclone Nargis and now this current global financial turmoil has had much impact on our tourism industry," a director of a Rangoon-based tour agency which mainly relies on the heretofore lucrative European market told Mizzima.

The lion's share of the Burmese tourism market, about 70 percent, is taken by the United States and European markets. The remaining 30 percent is taken by China, Japan and other Asian countries.

The tourism industry is trying to survive these bad times by employing sales promotions while slashing fares for tour guides, cars, air travel, hotels and meals, but business remains well below what would normally be expected.

Collapsing sub-prime mortgages in the United States last year, followed by a domino effect in other economic sectors, has impacted growth around the world.

"The European market has fallen sharply. We will be very lucky if we can get 50 percent of our usual market. Though the situation is slightly improved thanks to aggressive promotion techniques, it cannot catch up to the usual market," added the tour operator.

Meanwhile, the prices of tour bus rentals, hotels and meals are rising, so that the profit margin of tour operators has fallen by 20 to 30 percent, he continued.

Though income has drastically dropped, tour agencies are struggling to survive this stretch of stormy economic weather.

"Nowadays our selling of tour packages is so much more aggressive. We are all trying to get customers by drastically slashing prices as we want to keep our businesses running," a sales manager at another tour agency added.

Usually fully booked during the peak season of mid-September, the current situation is nowhere near what would be expected, he said.

Similarly, tour guides are also facing additional hardship these days.

"The tour operators have to share the limited assignments among our regular tour guides. We cannot give jobs to freelance ones," the manager added.

Previously tour guides were fully booked with assignments in the peak season, but some have not yet been given even a single assignment during what was to be this year's peak season.

Tour guide Kyaw Kyaw from Rangoon told Mizzima, "We get only one trip a month, and only a short trip. And our tour guide fees were also slashed to well below previous standards. Some guides have been unemployed for a long time, since the September unrest of last year".

Betancourt, en larmes, appelle les eurodéputés à aider les autres otages

AFP – 8 octobre 2008

BRUXELLES — L'ex-otage franco-colombienne Ingrid Betancourt, la voix étouffée par les sanglots, a lancé mercredi à Bruxelles devant des eurodéputés émus, un appel à ne pas oublier les autres otages de la guérilla des Forces armées révolutionnaires de Colombie (Farc).

"Je voudrais vous supplier, que les applaudissements qui s'élèveront de cette enceinte puissent leur porter à travers l'espace qui nous sépare notre grand amour, toute notre force et toute notre énergie. Qu'ils sachent que notre engagement est absolu, qu'ils aient la certitude que nous ne nous tairons jamais, et que nous ne cesserons jamais d'agir jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient tous libres", a-t-elle déclaré lors d'une séance solennelle dans un hémicycle plutôt clairsemé.

Elle a ensuite égrené les noms des 29 otages dits politiques restant encore aux mains des Farc.

Trois mois après sa libération, l'ancienne candidate à l'élection présidentielle colombienne, la voix souvent brisée par l'émotion ou les sanglots, a remercié à plusieurs reprises le Parlement européen de s'être battu pour elle.

"Tout a commencé ici, merci".

"Le Parlement européen est devenu une plate-forme pour que le monde connaisse l'ampleur de la barbarie que nous avons subie et que plus de 3.000 de mes compatriotes subissent encore", a-t-elle ajouté, célébrant un parlement "temple de la parole".

"Chaque fois que l'un de vous parle dans cette enceinte, l'infamie recule. Oui, les mots ont une véritable emprise sur le monde réel", a-t-elle affirmé.

"J'arrive plein d'admiration dans une enceinte qui ne cesse de me faire envie", a encore dit l'ancienne otage.

Mme Betancourt n'a pas oublié les autres "victimes" à travers le monde: la dirigeante de l'opposition birmane Aung San Suu Kyi, assignée à résidence, qui "a plus besoin que jamais de nos paroles pour la porter", ainsi que le soldat israélien Gilad Shalit.

Lors d'une conférence de presse après son audition, elle a d'autre part indiqué sa volonté de se rendre au Zimbabwe "pour soutenir la démocratie et les libertés individuelles", au Darfour pour "embrasser les mères et les enfants déplacés" ou encore en Somalie.

Myanmar junta raises suppression, says opposition

AP – 8 October 2008

YANGON, Myanmar — Myanmar's military rulers have stepped up suppression of political opponents ahead of the country's elections in 2010, an opposition party spokesman said Wednesday.

Nyan Win, of the National League for Democracy, said many party members arrested since last year were now facing trials, with at least 30 having been sentenced to at least 2 1/2 years in prison between September and early this month.

The regime has increased pressure on opponents and critics "so that they can manipulate the elections any way they like," he said.

The junta has announced elections in 2010 as part of a "roadmap to democracy" that critics have slammed as a sham designed to cement the military's power. A military-backed constitution was approved in a national referendum in May, but the party charges that the vote was unfair.

International human rights groups say the junta now holds more than 2,100 political prisoners, compared with nearly 1,200 in June, 2007.

Among those detained is Nobel Peace Prize laureate and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for more than 12 of the past 19 years.

Nyan Win said party members Soe Kywe, Khin Aye and Myint Thein — as well as a regime critic, Soe Kywe — were given 2 1/2 year prison sentences Monday for allegedly "disturbing tranquility."

The spokesman said Hline Aye and San Pwint, two other party members, were jailed for the same term on Sept. 22 for similar offenses.

Myanmar army moves against refugees, aid organization says

Deutsche Presse Agentur – 07 October 2008

Bangkok - Myanmar's army and their allies the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have launched an offensive against Karen refugees in the border region with Thailand, an aid organization said Tuesday.

Speaking from the border town Mae Sot in northern Thailand, Help Without Frontiers, an Italian-based organization aimed at helping refugees of the long-running Karen insurgency, said several villages have been overrun already.

'The villagers are chased, rice barns and food are sequestered or destroyed, large cornfields are burned as well as several houses in different villages,' the NGO said in a statement.

Five schools and two hospitals the organization was operating in the region with donations from Europe had to be closed. The helpers were still trying to treat the often heavily injured victims despite the fighting.

Myanmar's army was moving against members of the Karen ethnic minority with the aid of the DKBA, a breakaway from the Karen National Union (KNU), a rebel group that has been fighting for the autonomy of the Karen State for the past six decades.

In an attempt to escape the violence many fled to the border region with Thailand. The organization accused Thai authorities of driving back refugees across the border, after Myanmar soldiers and militiamen crossed into Thailand and committed acts of violence.

'And the international community is silent,' noted the NGO.

U.N. chief Ban may drop plans for Myanmar visit

Reuters - 07 October 2008

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said on Tuesday he would drop plans to make a long talked-about visit to Myanmar unless he is confident it would achieve tangible results in promoting democracy.

Ban has been asked by the U.N. Security Council to do his utmost to pursue reforms in military-ruled Myanmar, which drew international condemnation a year ago for a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters led by monks.

Ban's special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, made a sixth visit to the former Burma in August, but failed to meet the 63-year-old Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who has been under house arrest for most of the past five years.

A visit by Ban has long been discussed but no date had been set. Ban made a first visit to Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis in May to pressure the junta to cooperate more with international aid workers.

Ban said he would remain "constantly and personally engaged" in Myanmar.

"I would be willing to (make) a return visit to Myanmar at an appropriate time, but you should also know that without any tangible or very favorable result to be achieved, then I may not be in a position to visit Myanmar," Ban told reporters.

"I'm now in the process of making some groundwork which may allow me to consider my own visit, but ... I need some more time. I will have to consider all the circumstances, (and) when would be appropriate timing for me to visit," he said.

Western countries have condemned as a sham a May referendum on Myanmar's army-drafted constitution, part of a seven-step "roadmap to democracy" that is meant to culminate in multiparty elections in 2010 and end a nearly 20-year political stalemate.

Gambari has met government officials on his visits to Myanmar but has made little progress in promoting dialogue with Suu Kyi or the release of political prisoners.

[UN chief to Burma: reform or face isolation](#)

Bangkok Post/DPA - Oct 7, 2008, 19:40 GMT

New York - UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday he would cancel a planned visit to Burma unless the government there shows progress in democratisation and humanitarian programmes.

Ban last visited Burma in May in the wake of the destruction caused by Cyclone Nargis in a bid to convince the military government to accept international relief aid and admit foreign workers. The government did soften its stance against international aid workers by loosening up visa restrictions.

But Ban has not yet made a return trip to make sure that funds and relief goods were used properly.

He said his plan for a new visit remains, but is dependent on whether Burma has carried out democratic reform, national reconciliation and the release of all political prisoners as demanded by the UN.

"I would be willing to make a return visit to Myanmar at an appropriate time, but you should also know that without any tangible or very favorable result to be achieved, then I may not be in a position to visit Myanmar," Ban said, using the military regime's name for the country.

"I'm now in the process of making some groundwork which may allow me to consider my own visit, but I need some more time," he said. "I will have to consider all the circumstances, and when it would be appropriate timing for me to visit."

The Burmese dictatorship has so far refused to release Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, who has spent more than 10 years under house arrest for demanding democracy. The military has ruled the impoverished nation for more than four decades.

[NLD Seeking to Negotiate 'Democratic Reforms'](#)

Irrawaddy - Tuesday, October 7, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING - The National League for Democracy (NLD) is seeking to negotiate "democratic reform" with the Burmese generals if they will establish a constitution review committee, a NLD spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"If we get those chances, we will hold bilateral negotiations and go on based on our agreement," said Nyan Win, an NLD spokesperson. "Our idea is for 'democratic reform.' We willingly want to negotiate with them [authorities]."

Other NLD members said that if the military government is willing to review the constitution, the opposition NLD party may be willing to take part in the national elections in 2010.

The junta held a referendum in May on the constitution, which was drafted by its hand-picked delegates. After the referendum, it announced that more than 92 percent of the voters approved the constitution. Critics and opposition groups inside and outside the country called the constitution and referendum a sham.

The constitution guarantees the military continues to dominate the country's political future by assigning its own representatives seats in the people's parliament without contesting in elections.

On September 22, the NLD released a statement calling for a review of the constitutional process, calling the draft constitution "one-sided" and lacking the participation of the 1990-elected members of parliament.

Nyan Win did not discuss any details it might propose regarding the constitution. The Burmese authorities have not responded to the request

Some observers said they were pessimistic the junta would review its own constitution.

Cin Sian Thang, the chairman of the Zomi National Congress, said he didn't think the generals would agree to a review because they are in the middle of their "seven-step road map" to democracy.

"Even if we [ethnic leaders and NLD leaders] didn't agree with the junta's road map, they [Burmese authorities] are likely to continue. If they finish their process, the situation in Burma will only worsen," he said.

The UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari earlier this year also asked the junta to review the constitution but Information Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan told the envoy in March, "It is impossible to review or rewrite the constitution which was drawn with the participation of delegates from all walks of life."

Thakin Chan Htun, a veteran Burmese politician in Rangoon, said the general election should be free and fair and the detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi should be allowed to participate.

To be a free and fair election, he said, the junta should first release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi.

All Burmese citizens should be allowed to vote in the multi-party election and the international community, including UN representatives, foreign observers and journalists, should be allowed to freely report on the general election, said Thakin Chan Htun.

The state constitution is step three of the regime's seven-step "road map." The fifth-step is the 2010 general election.

On September 25, after releasing a statement calling for a review of the constitution, the NLD was warned by the head of Burma's police, Brig-Gen Khin Yi, to withdraw the statement. The authorities said it might motivate citizens to undertake activities critical of the military government and undermine the security of the state.

The NLD, the main opposition party in Burma, won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections in 1990. However, the current Burmese government, led by Snr-Gen Than Shwe, ignored the election results and refused to transfer power to Suu Kyi's NLD.

[Burma's military strongman number two visits Bangladesh](#)

Mizzima - Tuesday, 07 October 2008 21:50

by Mungpi - New Delhi - Strongman number two in the Burmese military junta's hierarchy, Vice Snr. General Maung Aye arrived in Dhaka on a three-day official visit on Tuesday.

The Burmese delegation led by Maung Aye will hold talks with senior Bangladesh officials on wide ranging issues including a road link between the two countries, the maritime boundary dispute, and Bangladesh's request to lease land in Burma's western Arakan state, the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry has stated.

Maung Aye, leading a delegation comprising seven cabinet ministers, on Tuesday held talks with Chief Adviser of the Bangladesh's interim government Fakhruddin Ahmed, who laid out a red-carpet welcome.

According to a Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry statement on Monday, maritime boundaries and a 25 kilometre cross-border road, are likely to top the agenda during talks. Maung Aye will also hold separate meetings with his counterpart.

"This symbolic visit will also have substantive components (and) our talks will cover the total gamut of our political and economic relations," Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said in a statement on Monday.

According to a Bangladesh based Burmese news agency, Kaladan Press Network (KPN), Bangladesh is keen on resolving the dispute over the maritime boundary with its neighbour Burma as it wants to explore the Bay of Bengal for natural gas reserves.

Bangladesh wants to finalise the 25-kilometre road-link for which the two countries signed an agreement in July 2007.

"Bangladesh views the road link as vital, because this will give them a gateway to connect to China as well as Southeast Asian countries," Tin Soe, Assistant Editor of the KPN said.

The U.S dollar 20 million "Friendship Road", which will commence from Gundhum in Cox's Bazaar of Bangladesh to Baulibazaar in Burma, is designed to connect China's Kunming under a tri-nation road connectivity that will give Bangladesh access to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore and to the Asian Highway.

"Bangladesh has been pushing hard to ensure the road link, but Burma seems to be reluctant though we do not yet know what the result of this visit will be," Tin Soe said.

Tin Soe said the Burmese junta does not view its relationship with Bangladesh as a priority though it does definitely want its support internationally.

"So, I think the junta will take some time to finalise the agreements," he added.

Besides the officially announced agenda, Tin Soe said, it is likely the talks will include the repatriation of Rohingya refugees who are sheltered along the Bangladeshi-Burmese border.

Bangladesh currently hosts over 200,000 Rohingya minorities from Burma's Arakan state, who fled the country due to repression. Bangladesh has been holding discussions with the Burmese government to send them back.

With Burma's military junta seeking regional support against international condemnation over the country's human rights situation, Maung Aye's visit to Dhaka marks a cosy up in relations between the two countries.

The two countries in recent years have maintained high-level visits. In December 2002, Burma's military supremo Senior-General Than Shwe visited Dhaka, while in 2003, Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited Rangoon, the then capital of Burma. In September 2005, Burma's military strongman number three General Thura Shwe Mann toured Bangladesh.

The two countries in 2003 signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on setting up of a joint trade commission and an agreement on coastal and maritime shipping.

[No change at the top](#)

DVB - Oct 7, 2008

In both the military and opposition groups in Burma, there have been few changes in leadership or policy and newer or younger members have been unable to move to the highest positions.

Dr Aye Chan, a history professor at Kanda University in Japan, Dr Aung Khin, a London-based historian and political analyst Aung Naing Oo spoke to *DVB* about the stagnation at the highest levels of the government and opposition, and discussed whether a change of leadership could mean a change in policy.

Political analyst Aung Naing Oo said the issue was common to both the regime and opposition groups.

Aung Naing Oo: "In Zimbabwe, Mugabe has been in power for 28 or 30 years, and in Cuba, Castro was in power for 40 or 50 years, and the same in North Korea. If you look at these dictatorial countries, the leaders stay in power for a long time. In Burma too, leaders have tended to stay in power for a long time. If you look at U Nu's parliamentary democracy era, the democratically elected U Nu was often re-elected. After that, general Ne Win was in power for 26 years, then general Saw Maung stayed for a while and now from 1992 to this day, general Than Shwe has ruled our country.

"Therefore, the military government doesn't change leaders, and the opposition doesn't much either. Change only happens when they die. For example, Kachin Independence Organisation chairman Brang Seng, Karen National Union chair general Mya and New Mon State Party chairman Nai Shwe Kyin were leaders for a long time. People have great respect for them. But because they were in their positions for a long time, the people who came up behind them have not been able to show off their talents or use their energy properly. And it ends up in blocking the way of talented people."

History professor Aye Chan believes this outlook is rooted in Burmese culture.

Aye Chan: "It is based on the Burmese people's political traditions and culture. In Burma, the idea of a leader appointed by the people is not understood. Only people who have managed to seize power are recognised as leaders. Based on this political tradition, the army gave this military bureaucracy a political form. Politics is dominated by a bureaucracy, and this became politics dominated by military bureaucrats. Therefore it is very difficult to change. The army bureaucracy holds all the keys to the economy and power."

Historian Aung Khin blames both leaders and party members for not challenging policy.

Aung Khin: "Politics can't be carried out one group of people. You have to look at whether the party members carry out the policy of the party effectively. If party members and the majority just follow the policies handed down by the central committee, like the communist parties do, you would have to say that the participation of the party members is not effective."

While the army's lack of change in leadership is understandable, the problem for the opposition is a lack of unity, according to Aye Chan.

Aye Chan: "As far as the opposition is concerned, they can't unite under a single ideology. Another point is that if we look at Burmese society, there are many ethnic nationalities with different aims and political beliefs, and there is no single united front."

Aung Naing Oo: "The second, third or lower levels of leaders can't challenge those above them. Furthermore, they don't have many options apart from the status quo. In the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, only members of parliament are allowed to take part, and only about 20 MPs came out, they have to be chosen from inside repeatedly, and no leaders with new ideas appear.

"In the KNU and the NMSP, we had general Mya and Nai Shwe Kyin, they were chosen in accordance with revolutionary traditions, and they ended up being chairmen for life. However much you talk about democracy, you can't override their authority and they don't change."

Aung Khin: "In other countries, a leader can lead up to a point and if they are not successful they can make way for another one. In the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the only leader. When she is free, the party is active. When she is detained, it is not active. Why is it like this? It is something to think about. In politics, when a leader falls, another one rises. It was the same in the past in Burma. When the top level leader is in prison, the second-in-command takes his place. And when the

second level goes to prison, the third takes his place. It is not like that here; it is formed like the army. Obey the orders or you will be expelled.

“A civil organisation can have proper discussions. Members must make effective decisions; they should not only obey orders. As far as I know, army officers can’t do that kind of thing, that’s why politics is dead. Now that U Win Tin and others a lot of experience have been released, the army officers don’t know their capabilities and are afraid of what they can do. They are afraid of this and send them to prison. That’s it.”

The All Burma Students’ Democratic Front is one of the few organisations that has made significant changes, but its enthusiastic commitment to democratic processes has been blamed by some for the weakening of the organisation.

Aung Naing Oo, a former ABSDF leader, disputes this accusation.

“As some leaders did not know what to do, and it was in the initial stages, some misused incomes funds, and this could not be covered up. The grassroots comrades used democratic means to remove them. The reason why there has been change within ABSDF is that there have been people with leadership qualities from all over Burma. It is not made up of one ethnic group. Therefore, there are more people who could become leaders. First, politically well-known activists such as Ko Moe Thee Zun became chairs. But when they were wrong, there were many chances to dislodge them by democratic means.

“The ABSDF’s mistake was not that they used democracy too much. The reasons why the ABSDF has become weak are firstly that they have no private income. They can’t sell teak like the Karen. They can’t sell jade like the Kachin. Another point is that ethnic groups are united by nationalism, and nationalism is more solid than weak democracy. It is easier to rally people. Ethnic groups also have their own territories and resources; they can recruit soldiers from their ethnic groups. The ABSDF didn’t have these things and became weak.”

When asked whether a change in leadership could bring about a change in Burmese politics, Aye Chan was sceptical that any significant change could be achieved within the military.

Aye Chan: “It’s not possible. The army bureaucracy has been established and it has become a system with strong basis. If there was no general Than Shwe, general Maung Aye would take his place. If there was no general Maung Aye, the people below him would take his place. That’s how it is. Moreover, they will systematically place their own people and family members in the army bureaucracy; they will become a more solid organisation. At the same time, the opposition will become weaker.”

Aung Khin: “The reason a change of leadership is needed is due to the lack of any other change. Something has to happen. If there has been no change in 20 years, this is not good. It would be better if something changed. People are waiting and waiting for it and become dejected and apathetic.”

Aung Naing Oo: “I don’t think that there could be an immediate and easy leadership change in the organisations as they currently are. In some organisations, there is little choice and they have to choose the best of a bad lot. Although people are saying that a leadership change is needed, if you have no good leaders to choose from, whether you are using a democratic approach or something else, it is very difficult to make changes.

“That’s why we are always seeing problems among ethnic nationality groups and within the NLD, opposition between the young people and the current leaders. But if a group is united behind its leaders, the group never changes and will stay under that leader. If they go on like that, that organisation will never improve and the political organisation will never change.

“Organisations want democracy but they do not have the proper conditions or time. They should think carefully if change is needed. If it is, they must include young people and new blood. These young people and elders working together need to make the right changes”

Reporting by Htet Aung Kyaw

[Burma's IT Generation Combats Regime Repression](#)

Irrawaddy - Tuesday, October 7, 2008

By YENI - A truck carrying a squad of police pulls up in front of a Rangoon's Internet café. The police burst into the café and shout to the customers sitting at the computer terminals: "Hands off!" Then they tour the terminals and check every screen, asking users to describe what they are looking at.

If anyone is found using G-talk, the police inquire further—"Who are you chatting with?" "Where do they live?" Customers who come up with wrong or suspicious answers can be arrested.

This scenario is a common one in Rangoon's Internet cafes nowadays—in this era where tech-savvy young Burmese chat away on G-talk, check out the social-networking sites Facebook, Hi5 and Friendster, surf exiled Burmese websites and blogs and even share information about how to slip past regime censors by using proxy servers.

Since the September 2007 uprising, the Internet has shaped the way they think, relax and communicate in their isolated, military-ruled country. The Internet has created a virtual community and a new arena for freedom of expression.

"The uprising in Burma is ultimately an example of a protest where digitally network technologies played a critical role," researcher Mridul Chowdhury reported in his paper "The Role of the Internet in Burma's Saffron Revolution," a case study for the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University.

Equipped with cell phones and digital cameras, and with access to the Internet, determined young Burmese are communicating with each other and the outside world as never before.

During last year's monk-led demonstrations, known as the Saffron Revolution, Internet users also became publishers of text, audio, and video files illustrating what was happening inside the country. Suddenly, Burma was attracting the full attention of such international media as the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. Condemnation of the regime's repression of the protests followed from many governments.

Burma's IT generation had a chance to flex its muscles before the generals pulled the plug on the Internet at the height of their crackdown on the September protests.

The junta has prevented Burmese citizens from using services like Hotmail, Yahoo and Gmail and to block Web sites and blogs set up by exiled Burmese critics of the regime. But Internet cafes responded by installing foreign-hosted proxy servers to circumvent the government restrictions.

Risking arrest, imprisonment and torture, young Burmese—notably journalists and bloggers—have continued to play a crucial role in informing the outside world of the true situation in Burma.

They are more likely than ever to see the Internet as a means of achieving freedom of expression with the advent of information technology. In their blogs and chat rooms, they have been demonstrating the active role they play in sharing information and debating important issues in politics and other areas of domestic concern.

This is the reason why, one year after the Saffron Revolution, Internet cafes are becoming subject to severe surveillance by the police. Cafe owners are forced to take screenshots of user activity every five minutes and deliver these images to the authorities on a regular basis.

The owner of one Internet cafe in downtown Rangoon said the local authorities and police intelligence officers had issued orders to provide ID information about customers.

According to Internet cafe owners and users in Rangoon, Internet speeds have slowed down considerably since mid-September, making it impossible to upload large files such as photos or videos.

Meanwhile, the Web sites of the exile-run, Oslo-based *Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)* and New Delhi-based *Mizzima News* were hit in July by DDoS attacks, shutting them down for several days.

Another DDoS attacks were again in September launched against *The Irrawaddy*, *DVB* and the Bangkok-based *New Era Journal*. The Web site of *Mizzima News* was hacked on October 1 with a cross-site scripting, making it inaccessible.

According to Chiang Mai-based freelance journalist Brian McCartan, two community forums *Mystery Zillion* and *Planet Myanmar*—Web sites providing information and instruction on how to circumvent the regime's control—were also disabled and shut down by similar attacks in August.

This kind of action by the regime, however, may indicate that the Internet has had an influence not only on ordinary users but also on the government's overall response to the street demonstrations, the experts argue.

"While any number of deaths is unacceptable, it is also possible that the government actually exercised restraint in the use of force against civilian protesters because of the Internet and international media attention," Chowdhury wrote.

He pointed out that at least 3,000 demonstrators were killed in the nationwide uprising in 1988, while the official death toll in the crackdown on the 2007 demonstrations was far lower—31.

"It is plausible that the military felt it was under greater scrutiny because of the Internet, and that it was therefore more restrained in its use of force," Chowdhury said.

[Bangladesh to procure 100,000 tons of rice from Myanmar](#)

Xinhua – 7 October 2008

DHAKA -- Bangladesh will procure 100,000 tons of rice from Myanmar on a regular basis as Dhaka mooted several proposals to expand bilateral trade and economic cooperation with Yangon.

The proposals included a gas pipeline from Myanmar to produce fertilizer in Bangladesh to meet Yangon's demand as well as contract farming by taking lease of Myanmar's agricultural lands.

The propositions were made during official talks between Bangladeshi caretaker government Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and visiting Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar Vice Senior General Maung Aye.

During the talks the two leaders discussed early construction of a 23-km road linkage inside Myanmar at a cost of 20.3 million U.S. dollars.

The Bangladeshi side proposed that the road linkage could be extended up to China to establish a direct road connecting China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Myanmar side said they would think about the proposal since it requires funding.

Briefing reporters, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said, the two leaders also discussed delimitation of maritime boundary. "Talks were extremely fruitful," he said.

The two sides also focused on how to increase bilateral trade from current 140 million U.S. dollars to 500 million U.S. dollars as Myanmar showed interest in importing more pharmaceutical products from Bangladesh. Present volume of trade is tilted towards Myanmar.

Besides, the two sides discussed intensifying military to military cooperation through training programs and exchange of visits between the two countries.

An agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation was signed after the meeting.

DFID Minister says UN humanitarian system must get smarter

Source: [United Kingdom Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#)

Date: 07 Oct 2008

International Development Minister Gareth Thomas today said that the world needed to get smarter at dealing with the increasing number of floods, hurricanes, droughts and other humanitarian crises.

Speaking in Geneva to humanitarian aid experts from the UN including UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, Gareth Thomas said that whilst there have been improvements we are still letting too many people down when they need help the most. This is because of lack of co-ordination and strong leadership within the countries affected to get the job done.

The number of reported disasters over the last ten years is 60% higher than over the previous decade, and in 2006 alone there was a 40% increase in the number of global floods and natural disasters. Over half of all public appeals since 2004 for help in the wake of a disaster have been climate related.

Reflecting on these stark figures, Gareth Thomas set out his vision of the improvements needed in order to give quicker and more effective help to people such as the half a million caught in the cyclone in Burma five months ago.

Gareth Thomas said:

"The pressure keeps mounting on developing countries as climate change and rising food prices take their toll, the extreme manifestation of this being the increasing number of humanitarian crises.

"One of the major problems is that many country-based UN country based humanitarian co-coordinators don't have the skills or right background to do their jobs.

"What's more alarming is increasing lack of UN co-coordinators. Of the 42 poor countries most at risk of conflict or natural disaster, 16 do not have humanitarian coordinators and in some of the worst humanitarian emergencies the international system does not have a leader on the ground able to drive the emergency response."

Gareth Thomas went on to say:

"If the current pattern of rising climate related disasters continues, by 2010 we will need at double the current number of UN humanitarian co-coordinators. We need to work harder to get the right people into these roles early enough, keep them there and make them accountable – these people are the lynchpins to the whole humanitarian effort when crises happen."

Gareth Thomas also said that in some cases bureaucracy was getting in the way of helping people, such as in the case of the Chad refugee crisis last year.

"What we saw in Chad was potentially life saving assistance such as clean drinking water being allocated unfairly. This was counter to basic humanitarian principles and is something that cannot happen again – I urge the UN to work with charities working in the field to agree on one system that works."

"We also need to work harder to make sure the funds given to the UN by governments, charities and indeed the public for disaster relief appeals are released in a faster and more user friendly way for people running projects on the ground, whilst protecting the high level of scrutiny that we have. Some projects are able to get up and running in a matter of days whilst other are critically delayed."

Gareth Thomas went on to pay tribute to the fantastic work that has been carried out to save the lives of millions in disasters such as the Mozambique floodings in 2007.

"There's no doubt that when disaster strikes the international community is committed to the cause of saving lives, but the systems that are in place and lines of accountability need to work better to get the most out of these efforts.

"This is why I propose that a task force be set up of Ministers from across the world to meet annually to discuss a way forward for the way the UN carries out its humanitarian role when disaster strikes. Millions of communities across the world are relying on us to get this right."

DFID provides crucial expertise to developing countries in the wake of humanitarian crises, working with the UN and charities such as the Red Cross to save lives. During the recent cyclone Burma and earthquake in China, DFID provided £45 million in aid to supply airlifts of small boats to carry aid to desolate areas in addition to a team of experts who worked in the area for four months following the disaster.

Notes to editors

1. DFID has given £2,249 million to help developing countries in the wake of humanitarian disasters in the past five years (2002-07).

2. DFID on behalf of the UK Government is the second largest humanitarian donor in the world, giving £45 million to help in the wake of Cyclone Nargis earlier this year and £66.4 million following the Tsunami of 2004.

3. DFID works in over 100 developing countries across the world. In the wake of humanitarian disasters our country offices work with a hub of DFID humanitarian experts based in London and charities and governments to save lives.

4. Gareth Thomas was speaking at the United Nations in Geneva during the Executive Committee of the UN High Commission for Refugees.

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[Britain seeks further U.N. reforms to save lives](#)

Reuters - Tue Oct 7, 2008 5:42pm BST

By Stephanie Nebehay - GENEVA - Britain called on Tuesday for further reforms to United Nations aid agencies, saying their slow response to disasters had cost lives.

Gareth Thomas, Britain's international development minister, also warned that poor nations are likely to face increased pressure as emergencies sparked by war, climate change and high food prices become more frequent and ferocious in coming years.

Yet only one-third of the 42 countries most at risk of conflict or disaster have a U.N. humanitarian coordinator in place to give on-site leadership during a crisis, he said.

"So in some of the worst disasters there is no one on the ground to lead the international response. The brutal truth is that lack of leadership costs lives," Thomas said in a speech to humanitarian aid experts gathered in Geneva.

In Chad this year, poor coordination among aid agencies had meant drinking water was "allocated unfairly" and people in desperate need had gone thirsty, he said.

"In Georgia, a humanitarian coordinator was eventually appointed but it was quite late. I think it slowed down the response," Thomas told Reuters.

He was referring to the conflict which erupted in the province of South Ossetia on Aug. 7, causing more than 100,000 people to flee into other parts of Georgia and southern Russia.

The United Nations has "much, much further to go" to ensure relief supplies get to those most in need worldwide, according to the Briton, who noted that higher food prices are already pushing 100 million more people into poverty and hunger.

"We need a humanitarian system that can adapt to these new pressures and make the most of the resources we have available," he said, adding that the U.N. should make pooled funds from donors ready for immediate use when disasters unfold.

A "single pot of money at country level" would allow U.N. humanitarian officials to act faster in the wake of a crisis, when lives are most at risk, he said.

"Having the U.N. with a fund to make resources available to them immediately means that individual agencies are not going to have to get out the 'begging bowl' and delay their responses on the ground to people who need shelter within 24 hours or medical aid straight away," Thomas told Reuters.

The U.N.'s Central Emergency Response Fund, set up nearly three years ago to jump-start relief operations in neglected parts of the world, should be increased to \$1 billion a year by 2010, he said. It now makes about \$400 million available a year. (Editing by Laura MacInnis and Sami Aboudi)

[Flood in Burma's 'Ruby Land' collapses building](#)

Mizzima - Wednesday, 08 October 2008 13:56

by Phanida - Chiang Mai - Incessant rains in the town of Mogoke in upper Burma caused a house to collapse on Wednesday morning, local residents said.

Following torrential rains overnight in Mogoke, known as the capital of Burma's 'Ruby Land', a surging Yeani Chaung River – which flows through the town – swept away a house located near its bank in the ward of Aung Chan Thar, according to locals.

"Yes the house collapsed and was carried away by the river at about 6 or 7 a.m. in the morning today after the water overflowed the river's bank. But nobody lived in the house and it frequently collapsed whenever there was a flood," Hla Oo, a local resident of Mogoke, told Mizzima.

The flood in Mogoke is the third this year, though so far there have been no reports of casualties related to this latest incident.

Mogoke, a valley town surrounded by hills in Mandalay Division, is famous for its rubies and ruby mines. However despite being rich in natural resources, the town is impoverished, subjected to irregular electricity and victim of an improper drainage system – which is partly responsible for the recurrence and severity of floods in the town.

Political prisoners nearly double in Burma: activists

[Mizzima](#) - Monday, 06 October 2008 23:01

by Solomon - New Delhi - Two human rights groups say the number of political prisoners in Burma has nearly doubled to over 2,000 in the past year and have urged the United Nations to pressure the ruling junta for their release.

In a new report entitled 'The Future in the Dark', the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) and the Washington-based United States Campaign for Burma (USCB) say prisons in Burma now hold 2,123 political prisoners, compared with 1,192 in June 2007.

The two groups, in a joint letter, urged the UN Secretary General and other members of the Security Council to pressure the Burmese military government to release all political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who has been detained for more than 12 of the past 19 years.

Despite resolutions and statements passed by various UN mechanisms, including the General Assembly, Human Rights Council and Security Council, calling for the release of political prisoners and improved human rights conditions, the ruling junta has continued to escalate its campaign of arrests and detentions directed at political activists since last year's Saffron Revolution.

The increase in the number of political prisoners proves the junta's defiance of the United Nations and the international community, as well as the wishes of its own people, the joint statement argues.

"This is a clear indication that the military junta continues forcing the entire population and country to live under permanent military dictatorship," the two groups postulate, urging the UN Secretary General to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma before or during his anticipated visit to the country in December.

The Burmese government, on September 23, released 9,002 prisoners. But according to the two groups only 10 political prisoners were included in those released. Additionally, Win Htein, a senior assistant to detained pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, though initially released on September 23, was re-arrested the following day.

The report, released on Monday, also said the UN, which has adopted successive resolutions since 1991 on Burma, has failed to force the junta to implement reforms and pressed the world body to take sterner action against Burma's ruling junta.

Tate Naing, Secretary of the AAPP-B, said "We want all members of the UN to come together and take stronger action against the Burmese junta."

However, the Burmese junta has repeatedly denied having any political prisoners in jails across the country, instead stipulating that everyone detained, including Burmese democracy icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is held for violating existing laws of the country.

But former UN human rights envoy to Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, said the junta shot dead at least 31 people and arrested thousands of activists during in the suppression of last September's mass protests.

"Within the past year, human rights abuses have escalated and the junta has arrested at least 700 to 900 political activists since the crackdown," said Tate Naing.

The two groups say that with the increasing number of political prisoners, the UN, in order to save the people of Burma from the junta's plan to legitimize its rule through a sham constitution and election, should take a stronger stand.

"We strongly urge the United Nations to stand for the people of Burma by taking effective measures without further delay," the two rights groups put forth.

Burma Demands Attention: General Assembly President

[Irrawaddy](#) - Monday, October 6, 2008

By LALIT K JHA / UNITED NATIONS - UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann said Burma "is certainly one of the areas of our world that demands our attention and our solidarity."

Brockmann made his remarks during a briefing at the conclusion of the general debate of the UN General Assembly. He said his "solidarity with the people of Myanmar" remains, in response to a question on Burma.

Since he assumed the presidency of the General Assembly this session, Brockmann so far has maintained a silence on Burma, making no comments regarding violation of human rights, restoration of democracy or continued arrests of political activists in Burma.

When asked specifically what his plans were for Burma as the General Assembly president, he said: "We do not come here with a pre-conceived plan, or with the idea that the president of the General Assembly is going to solve all conflicts and they are going to have to accept my preconceived recipes for peace."

However, Brockmann, who is never shy of reflecting his anti-US agenda at the UN, said he is working on the Burma issue by getting the best and most reliable information from various sources.

"My job as president is to work with the General Assembly members, to gather [them] and come at some viable way of helping our brothers and sisters in Myanmar in whatever the difficulties are," he said.

"It is premature to tell you what exactly what those steps would be," he said. Discussions are currently in an initial, consultative phase that allows member states to gather objective information on the situation, he said.

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, called for the release of Burma's political prisoners including detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We believe that there are still 2,000 political prisoners in Myanmar," said Pilly on Thursday during her first press conference since taking office. "We are asking the authorities in Rangoon to free them."

The high commissioner also called the detention of Suu Kyi "completely illegal, even in respect of the country's law."

Pimentel says ASEAN Charter should be used to end repression of Burmese people

[Philippines News Agency](#) - 06 October 2008

MANILA, Oct. 6 — Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. (PDP-Laban) on Monday said the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should be used as an effective mechanism for restoring democracy, peace and reconciliation in Myanmar where the civil liberties of the Burmese people continue to be ruthlessly suppressed under the iron rule of a well-entrenched military junta.

While expressing his inclination to support the ratification of the ASEAN Charter which is now being debated in the Senate, Pimentel voiced reservation over the apparent lack of provisions in the covenant to compel member-states to adhere to fundamental principle of respect for human rights.

He lamented that Myanmar has been remiss in complying with its commitment as an ASEAN member-state to take concrete steps towards the restoration of democracy and the holding of free elections in that country.

He said the ruling junta has conveniently reneged on such commitment in the absence of any sanctions from the ASEAN due to its policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member-states.

Pimentel asked whether the regional grouping is following a correct and credible policy by not sanctioning Myanmar considering that "in this time an age, human rights are no longer the concern of particular countries because these are rights that transcend boundaries of nations."

"If we adopt the ASEAN Charter as proposed, what is going to happen to our stand that all countries in ASEAN must recognize and protect human rights and no member-state can avail of the excuse that this is interference in our national affairs?" he said.

Pimentel said that a provision in the ASEAN Charter mandating the creation of a human rights body appears to be a laudable step.

But he noted that the nature and functions of that proposed body still have to be fleshed out after the Charter comes into force.

Obviously, he said, the usual diplomatic way the Philippines and other ASEAN members of appealing to Myanmar's military rulers to stop violating human rights and to release opposition leaders from detention has not worked.

Pimentel said Myanmar was already on the way to democracy when it held free elections in 1990 where majority of the seats in the National Assembly were won by the National League for Democracy under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi.

But the military nullified the election results, dissolved the Parliament without any excuse and arrested and imprisoned Aung San and several other opposition leaders.

Pimentel said Aung San remains under house arrest up to this day because the ruling junta would always extend her detention.

He said the ruling junta mounted a crackdown on dissenters in the wake of the massive street protests in September last year, led by Buddhist monks, resulting in the arrest of thousands and massacre of a huge number of so-called enemies of the regime. Scores of people remain unaccounted for, the likely victims of enforced disappearances.

Pimentel said that only last week, it was reported that more than 9,000 political prisoners were released upon the ruling junta's order.

But a subsequent report said many of them were rearrested for their continuing peaceful opposition to the regime.

Pimentel said the ruling junta's claim that it is taking steps to return to democracy by formulating a new Constitution is contradicted by complaints from Burmese opposition leaders that no free public discussion of this fundamental law were allowed by the junta.

He said the major tribal groups were also excluded from the consultation process before the Constitution was ratified.

Detained Activists Protest against Trial Conditions

[Irrawaddy](#) - Monday, October 6, 2008

By MIN LWIN - Detained members of the 88 Generation Students Group will refuse to cooperate with the court at their trial unless family members are allowed to attend, their lawyers have announced.

Aung Tun, brother of activist Ko Ko Gyi, said the authorities had informed families of the accused on Friday that they would not be allowed to attend court hearings in Insein Prison.

Family members were admitted to a previous hearing in early September. Aung Tun said it wasn't known why they were being excluded from the next sessions of the Rangoon East district court.

The authorities have also changed the days for family visits, and refused Htay Htay Kyi, the sister of detained political and labor activist Su Su Nway, permission to visit her.

Tate Naing, secretary of the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP)—said family members of detained political activists have the right to attend court hearings.

Prominent leaders of the 88 Generation Students group were arrested in August 2007, at the start of demonstrations leading up to September's uprising. They included Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Htay Win Aung, Min Zeya, Kyaw Min Yu (also known as Jimmy) and Mya Aye. They had led a march on August 19 protesting against sharp increases in the prices of fuel and other commodities.

Many former student leaders are serving long prison terms—some have been in prison for more than 15 years.

On Monday, activist Soe Myint Hein was sentenced to four years and six months imprisonment. A woman activist, Khin Aye, and other two others received sentences of two years and six months.

Two Burmese human rights groups released a report on Monday saying the number of political prisoners in Burma had nearly doubled in little more than one year.

A UN report in June 2007 gave the number of political prisoners as 1,192 political prisoners in Burma. The number now was at least 2,123, said a report issued jointly by the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) and the United States Campaign for Burma, based in Washington, DC.

The report accused the Burmese military government of defying a UN Security Council demand in October 2007 for the release of all political prisoners, including the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi.

"By nearly doubling the number of political prisoners, the Burmese regime is directly defying the UN, including the UN Security Council," said Bo Kyi, a former political prisoner and co-founder of the AAPP.

The AAPP and USCB sent an open letter to the UN Secretary-General calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Suu Kyi.

Burma destroys 16 tons of contaminated milk powder

[Mizzima News](#) - Monday, 06 October 2008 21:34

Chiang Mai – Melamine contaminated hazardous milk powder to the tune of 16 tons were burnt in Burma, the ministry of health said.

After the milk powder, manufactured by Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group, was found to be contaminated with the industrial chemical melamine, the Burmese Health Ministry burnt it to protect children from health hazards.

"We are still testing and investigating. After which we shall issue an official notice. We started destroying 16 tons of milk powder after it was found to be contaminated," an official of the Ministry of Health told Mizzima on condition of anonymity. But he declined to name the company.

Four children died and 53,000 fell ill in China after having milk powder contaminated with an industrial chemical used in plastic and fertilizer production.

The Health Ministry said that they were investigating the companies registered in Rangoon and Mandalay which are importing the contaminated milk products.

But shopkeepers in Amarapura said that they had not yet received any notice to stop selling milk powder imported from China.

"No one has come and informed us not to sell these products and we have not yet received any order restricting sales. But the volume of sales has declined. Those who are aware of the problem have stopped using these products. But these products are still on the shelf," a trader said.

Though transportation of the China manufactured contaminated milk products to Kachin State's capital 'Myitkyinar' is banned, local shopkeepers are still selling these products, local people said.

"We cannot send milk products to Myitkyinar now as there are many checkpoints on the road for inspection. But there are some such products on the shelves. The volume of sales has come down and most customers have stopped buying them. But some customers are still using them," a local from Laiza said.

Meanwhile because of news of the contaminated milk products spreading, shops in Rangoon selling mainly New Zealand manufactured milk product - 'Pep' have suffered a fall in sales by 40 per cent, a shopkeeper said.

"The milk products sold at our shop have been tested and there is no information of any contamination like melamine in our product. We use only raw material imported from New Zealand. Nothing is imported from China. We distribute only 'whole milk powder'. Most of the customers dare not use milk products and we have suffered a drop in sales by 40 per cent," he said.

China's Reputation On Product Safety Reaches a New Low [Washington Post Foreign Service](#) - Tuesday, October 7, 2008; A14

By Blaine Harden - TOKYO, Oct. 6 -- Thanks to tainted milk, [China's](#) product-safety reputation is plumbing new depths.

Even Burma -- where one of the world's most repressive and isolated military governments relies on trade with China -- has now warned its people to steer clear of all Chinese dairy products.

The generals who run Burma, owing to a bloody military assault last year on Buddhist monks and democracy protesters, are sealed off from much of the world by economic sanctions. They increasingly depend on China for everything from military hardware to consumer goods.

Still, the Burmese government has publicized its destruction of 16 tons of Chinese baby food tainted with melamine, the industrial chemical that was mixed with milk products, leading to the deaths in China of four infants, the sickening of more than 54,000 babies and a Chinese government crackdown on 22 dairy companies.

"Authorities concerned have urged the people not to consume milk and dairy products," the state-run New Light of Myanmar reported Sunday in Rangoon, the nation's largest city. Burma is also known as Myanmar.

The anomaly of consumer protection in Burma points to the scale and severity of China's global public-relations disaster in the wake of what appears to have been a long-standing, industrial-scale scheme to adulterate infant formula and other milk products.

Dairy operators add melamine to milk products to increase their protein levels and to increase the profits they bring. The chemical often causes kidney stones when consumed by babies in infant formula.

A global backlash to the milk scandal continues to uncover melamine-tainted foods, from "Chocolate Pillows" sweets in Osaka, [Japan](#), to a milkshake in Austria to White Rabbit Creamy Candies in West Hartford, Conn. The scandal has touched some of the world's largest food companies, as [Nestle](#), Cadbury, Mars and [Kraft Foods](#) have recalled products or suspended sales. Imports of Chinese dairy products have been suspended from Brunei to Burundi, Cambodia to [Russia](#).

"China is overwhelming other countries with its ability to produce things at a cheaper price," said Yoko Tomiyama, head of the [Consumers Union](#) of Japan, where paranoia about Chinese food products is now ubiquitous. "As long as this globalized consumer system prevails, there will always be the next melamine."

Over the weekend, China announced the arrest of six more people suspected of producing and selling melamine. They were detained in northern China, where the country's milk industry is based.

Trying to contain damage from the scandal, China announced Sunday that no traces of melamine were found in a large test of milk products sold across the country. Chinese newspapers reported Monday that the tests were conducted in 27 cities on more than 600 batches of milk.

It was the second time in a week that the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine has said that tests have found no contamination.

The stock price of three of China's largest dairy companies rose Monday in trading in Hong Kong and Shanghai, after government tests cleared some of their products of contamination.

Complaints by parents about sick children first surfaced last December in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province. Doctors there also issued warnings.

But the scandal did not become public until Sept. 11 when a journalist posted an item on a Chinese social Web site about the sick children. It mentioned Sanlu Dairy Co., a 50-year-old firm that health officials say covered up the complaints of worried parents.

Hundreds of police officers have since conducted raids on pastures, breeding farms and milk-purchasing stations in the Shijiazhuang area.

The Agriculture Ministry said over the weekend that it was trying to help dairy farmers whose businesses have been ruined by collapsing demand for milk. In a statement posted on its Web site, the ministry said: "On the one hand, we must crack down on illegal behavior, but on the other hand we must protect the interests of the dairy sector."

Special correspondent Akiko Yamamoto contributed to this report.

Burma After the Flood: Burma's Muslim Rohingya Minority Dwell at the "Brink of Extermination" [The Cutting Edge](#) - October 6th 2008

Benedict Rogers - It is not often you meet someone who tells you that he is from "a people at the brink of extermination." But the testimonies from refugees in a remote corner of southern Bangladesh, on the border with Burma, justify that assessment. For the Rohingya people, a Muslim minority in northern Arakan State, western Burma, are a stateless people whose very identity is denied.

All the people of Burma are suffering at the hands of one of the world's most brutal, and illegitimate, military regimes. From time to time Burma's crisis hits the headlines, as it did with protests led by Buddhist monks last September, and Cyclone Nargis in May this year. In between such events, however, Burma fades from the world's attention.

If Burma as a whole is under-reported, the people on its western borders are almost unknown to the world. Journalists, activists and aid agencies who visit the region tend to head for the Thailand-Burma border, where access to refugees, displaced people and democracy groups is greatest.

Few visit Burma's borders with India, where a famine is unfolding, or with China, where women are trafficked into prostitution, and fewer still make it to the Bangladesh border where a slow, forgotten genocide is taking place.

The Rohingya people are ethnically and culturally closely related to the Bengali people in the area surrounding Chittagong, but have lived in Burma for generations. While their precise history may be debated, there is no doubt that they are not newcomers to the country. Yet unlike all the other ethnic groups in Burma, which although severely persecuted by the regime are at least recognised as citizens, the Rohingyas are regarded as "temporary residents" and denied full citizenship status. They are required to obtain permission before marrying, and a permit can take several years to secure. Movement is severely restricted – Rohingyas must obtain permission to travel even from one village to another, impeding access to medical care and education. As 'non-citizens', Rohingyas cannot be employed as teachers, nurses, civil servants or in any public service, and in Rohingya areas teachers, mostly from the Buddhist Rakhine ethnic group, sometimes fail to turn up for an entire year, disrupting educational

opportunities for the Rohingyas. Rape and forced labour are widespread, and Rohingyas are singled out by the authorities for extortion. Soldiers demand money from them, and when they cannot pay they are arrested and tortured.

On a visit to the Bangladesh-Burma border, I heard numerous accounts of these violations from Rohingya refugees. And they were confirmed by three defectors who had escaped from Burma's military. The defectors, who had served in the Burma Army's border security force known as the 'Na Sa Ka', said that the Rohingyas were specifically targeted for extortion. One said: "Throughout my life in the Na Sa Ka, I was used to this system of arresting Muslims, asking for money, torturing them, every day. We only arrested Muslims, not Rakhines."

The Rohingyas face religious persecution as well. It is almost impossible to obtain permission to renovate, repair, rebuild or extend mosques or other religious buildings. In the past three years, 12 mosques in northern Arakan have been demolished, and a large number were closed in 2006. Since 1962, I was told, not a single new mosque has been built. Religious leaders have been jailed for illegally renovating mosques.

A senior UN official, who has served in Darfur, Somalia and other humanitarian crisis situations and, in the words of a foreign diplomat, "knows misery when he sees it", recently described the situation in northern Arakan State, western Burma, as "as bad as anything he has seen in terms the denial of basic human freedoms".

For these reasons, it is estimated that at least 200,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh. In 1978 and 1991, there were significant influxes of refugees fleeing across the border, and even today Rohingyas trickle out one by one, in the hope of finding security in Bangladesh. However, even in Bangladesh, they are vulnerable. Only 27,000 are recognised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and live in two official camps. Thousands more are unrecognised, and live either in Bangladeshi towns and villages or in temporary 'makeshift' camps where conditions are dire. In the makeshift camps they receive no access to health care or education, and no rations. Even in the official camps, there is no formal education beyond the age of 12. One 18 year-old is teaching in one of the schools, but has no opportunity for further study himself. "I am compelled to teach, but I would prefer to learn first," he told me. "If I stay like this, with no further education, my future life will be ruined."

A few years ago, the UNHCR forcibly repatriated at least 230,000 Rohingyas back to Burma, but many have returned, unable to survive in their homeland. One refugee said: "As long as human rights abuses continue in Burma, we cannot go back. We are caught between a crocodile and a snake. Where can we go?" Another expressed their dilemma, and statelessness, equally starkly: "The Bangladesh authorities say we are from Burma. The Burmese regime says we are Bengali. Where should we go?"

As part of its campaign against the Rohingyas, the junta regularly stirs up anti-Muslim sentiment among the Buddhist Rakhine and Burmans, with some success. "The regime uses the Rakhine against us as part of a divide-and-rule policy," said one Rohingya. And so in addition to facing persecution from the regime, the Rohingyas face discrimination from Burma's democracy movement too. Many Rakhine and Burmans in the democracy movement refuse to recognise the Rohingyas as an ethnic group, and they have been denied membership of the opposition Ethnic Nationalities Council. There is a dispute even over the term 'Rohingya', and many Rakhine prefer to call them "Arakanese Muslims", "Burmese Muslims" or "Bengalis of Burma".

Some Rakhine, however, have recognised the need to work with the Rohingyas against their common enemy, the regime. After all, the Rakhine are also victims of the junta. In schools, teachers use Burmese and the Rakhine language is banned. Forced labour is widespread. "The regime is carrying out an attack on our language, identity and culture," said one Rakhine. The National United Party of Arakan (NUPA) has an alliance with the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO). One NUPA leader told me: "When a people have been living this long through history, why should they be deprived of their citizenship rights?"

"The regime is trying to take away our identity," a Rohingya leader told me. "We will not be there in the very near future. The disintegration of our society will take place. Our prime concern is that we must not be eliminated." With that context, it is perhaps not surprising that some Rohingyas have been radicalised, feeling they have few allies in the world. Militant Islamist groups have preyed on their vulnerability. There

are even suggestions that some Rohingyas have been linked to al-Qaeda. All the more reason, it seems, why it is essential to speak up for them, and encourage Burma's democracy movement to be more inclusive. Not only is there a strong moral case to speak out against their persecution, but a powerful strategic incentive to do so as well. As one moderate Buddhist Rakhine told me: "We have to reach out to moderate Rohingyas, and work with them, because if we don't, they will have nowhere else to go but radical Islamism." Burma is troubled enough as it is, without that prospect to add to its woes.

Benedict Rogers is the author of A Land Without Evil: Stopping the Genocide of Burma's Karen People (Monarch, 2004), and has visited Burma and its borderlands more than 20 times. He also serves as Deputy Chairman of the UK Conservative Party's Human Rights Commission.

See a full report on the situation [here](#)

For further information, see [here](#)

U.N. Blocked on Burma Child Soldiers: Political obstruction and lack of access to affected areas have blocked U.N. efforts to end recruitment of child soldiers in Burma.

[Radio Free Asia](#) - 2008-10-04

WASHINGTON—A U.N. panel charged with fighting the recruitment of child soldiers has notably failed to make progress in Burma, where school-age children are conscripted by both the ruling junta and ethnic rebel armies, experts say.

"The United Nations team in Burma is severely restricted in what it can do, where it can go, and what kind of information it can collect," Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, said in an interview.

"And so it's been very hampered in coming up with any documentation about the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Burma's military."

The military is the single most powerful institution in Burma, having run the country without interruption since seizing control in a 1962 coup. Military generals have crushed political dissent and battled ethnic separatist movements ever since. Officers and their families enjoy privileges unknown to civilians.

According to New York-based Human Rights Watch, the Burmese regime may have the largest number of child soldiers in the world—with thousands swept up in massive recruitment drives.

Some are as young as 10, Human Rights Watch says, their enlistment papers routinely falsified to indicate their ages as 18 or older.

...They go to marketplaces, train stations, public places, and basically threaten and coerce children, saying, 'If you don't join the army, you're going to go to jail.'"

Jo Becker, Human Rights Watch

The United Nations Secretary General has cited Burma six times since 2002 in reports to the Security Council as among the world's worst perpetrators of child recruitment.

Some armed ethnic groups fighting against the junta also recruit children, experts said. These include the United Wa State Army, Kachin Independence Army, Karenni National People's Liberation Front, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Shan State Army-South, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Karen National Union Peace Council.

Working Group

The U.N. Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, created in July 2005, monitors and reports on child recruitment in countries of concern around the world. It can also recommend sanctions, including arms embargoes, against governments and armed groups that continue to recruit.

The Working Group maintains a "country task force" in Burma's former capital, Rangoon.

But lack of access to conflict zones has hindered U.N. efforts to locate and help child soldiers in Burma, according to a high-level U.N. report released in November 2007.

“Access to conflict-affected areas is severely restricted by the Government, a situation that impacts greatly on monitoring and possible responses to child rights violations,” the report said.

And though Working Group efforts have achieved “concrete results” in Sri Lanka, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other countries, Becker said, “Burma is very politicized within the Security Council.”

China's role

China, a permanent member of the Security Council, has for many years blocked discussion of Burma in the U.N., Becker said.

“Once [Burma] came onto the agenda of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, China basically obstructed every constructive proposal that was put forward to try and address the problem of ongoing child recruitment in Burma.”

“That's one of the reasons why we're seeing such inaction,” Becker said.

Calls seeking comment from China's delegation to the United Nations went unreturned.

“The Security Council Working Group is a political body, and in that sense is susceptible to some of the political positions of the [larger] Security Council,” said Radhika Coomaraswamy, U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, speaking in September at the Washington-based U.S. Institute of Peace.

“In certain countries, especially when we deal with governments, they are much less likely to move as fast,” Coomaraswamy said. “They will move faster on a non-state actor.”

Coomaraswamy noted that Burma's junta has recently sought to “engage” the United Nations on the issue by forming its own monitoring group, called the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children.

“Recruitment continues,” though, Coomaraswamy said.

Coomaraswamy has reported that Burmese children have been lured into joining the army with promises of food and shelter—with brokers sometimes receiving as much as U.S. \$32 (40,000 kyat) per child recruited from the streets.

Replacement recruits

Burma's recruitment of child soldiers is now driven largely by desertions from the Burmese army, Becker said.

“Recruiters are under enormous pressure to bring in new soldiers, and they find that children are the most vulnerable targets,” Becker said.

“And so they go to marketplaces, train stations, public places, and basically threaten and coerce children, saying, ‘If you don't join the army, you're going to go to jail,’” she said.

“The fact that, after six years of reporting from the Secretary General, the [Security] Council has still done so little is clearly at great cost to the children of Burma.”

Reported in Washington by Richard Finney. Produced and edited for the Web by Sarah Jackson-Han.

New Report Documents Huge Increase in Burma Political Prisoners

MyNews.in - 6/10/2008 10:32:49 AM(IST)

Ch. Narendra - Two human rights organizations released a new report today detailing that the number of political prisoners held by Burma's military junta has nearly doubled over the past year even after the UN Security Council demanded in October 2007 that the junta release all political prisoners, including the world's only imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi.

The report, entitled "The Future in the Dark: the Massive Increase in Burma's Political Prisoners", was jointly produced by the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP) and the United States Campaign for Burma (USCB), based in Washington, DC.

The report is slated for release on 6 October 2008, just after the first anniversary of the Burmese junta's crackdown on Burmese Buddhist monks' "Saffron Revolution". During the crackdown, the junta beat, tortured, imprisoned, or shot many monks who were marching peacefully in the streets and calling for an end to military dictatorship.

Many everyday people and monks -- an estimated over 100 -- were killed during the brutal crackdown. The release of the report is coincide with the launch of Dignity and Justice for Detainees Initiative, which aims to increase the pressure on States, parliaments, judiciaries, and other relevant institutions to abolish, or at least reduce, arbitrary and unlawful detention, by the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Along with the report (attached), the AAPP and the USCB today sent an open letter to the United Nations Secretary-General and the main bodies of the UN, calling on the world body to obtain the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma.

The letter is addressed to the Presidents of the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council, Members of the Security Council, as well as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and newly appointed Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay.

The report states that in June 2007 the United Nations reported that there were 1,192 political prisoners in Burma. Now, there are at least 2,123 political prisoners in Burma -- a 78% increase. About 700-900 of them were arrested during the peaceful protests in August and September last year.

On September 23, the regime announced that it had released over 9,000 prisoners from various prisons, but only 10 political prisoners were included. U Win Htein, senior assistant to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released on 23 September and rearrested the next day. Almost all of the 2,100 political prisoners remain incarcerated.

"By nearly doubling the number of political prisoners, the Burmese regime is directly defying the United Nations, including the UN Security Council," said Bo Kyi, a former political prisoner and a co-founder of the AAPP. "Yet, the UN is paralyzed because the Secretary-General is still reluctant to call on China to work together with other members of the Security Council to secure the release of all prisoners by the end of December."

The Secretary-General is expected to travel to Burma at the end of December, and the report authors are calling on him to arrange the release of all political prisoners in Burma by the conclusion of his trip, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The Secretary-General has a clear mandate from the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma," added Aung Din, a former political prisoner and executive director of USCB.

"It is time for Ban Ki-moon to show his effective leadership and moral authority, vested in him by the 192 members of the United Nations. He must make Burma's dictator Than Shwe realize that freeing all political prisoners by the end of December is a necessary first step toward national reconciliation and democratization. "

On 11 October 2007, the UN Security Council issued a Presidential Statement that demanded the release of all political prisoners: "emphasizes the importance of the early release of all political prisoners and remaining detainees."

Besides the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have also called for the release of all political prisoners in Burma.

Since 1991, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions on Burma calling for the release of all political prisoners. In February 2008, the UNGA said the regime should "release without delay those who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, as well as political prisoners, immediately and unconditionally, including the leaders of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and

U Tin Oo, the leaders of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Khun Htun Oo, and other Shan leaders, and the "88 Generation" students' group leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi."

On December 2007, the UN Human Rights Council called on the regime to "release all political detainees in Myanmar, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

FAO to extend cyclone aid project period for Myanmar

[Xinhua](#) – 5 October 2008

YANGON -- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations will extend the period of its Myanmar cyclone aid project for another six months to run until next year, Flower News reported Sunday.

Some 33.5 million U.S. dollars of fund for the extended project are being sought, the FAO resident representative was quoted as saying.

The extended project is designed to benefit 50,000 lesser-land-owned and 100,000 landless storm-survived households, the sources said, adding that the fund will further help develop agriculture, livestock breeding and forestry undertakings locally until next summer.

In July this year after May storm, the FAO agreed to provide emergency relief aid supplies for an initial six-month period to storm survivors in two cyclone-hard-hit regions of Ayeyawaddy and Yangon for the resumption of their agricultural and fishery production, according to earlier local report quoting the Myanmar Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

The FAO also donated 600 cattle for four cyclone-hit areas of Kungyankon, Mawlamyinegyun, Ngaputaw and Phyapon to help restart agricultural cultivation there, the Livestock Breeding Department said.

The FAO-donated cattle were purchased from lesser-cyclone-hit region of Bago and cyclone-free northern region of Mandalay, it added.

Deadly tropical cyclone Nargis, which occurred over the Bay of Bengal, hit five divisions and states -- Ayeyawaddy, Yangon, Bago, Mon and Kayin on May 2 and 3, of which Ayeyawaddy and Yangon inflicted the heaviest casualties and massive infrastructural damage.

The storm has killed 84,537 people, leaving 53,836 missing and 19,359 injured according to official death toll.

Altogether 300,000 cattle died in cyclone-hard-hit Ayeyawaddy and Yangon divisions.

Aftermath of a Revolt: Myanmar's Lost Year

[New York Times](#) - October 5, 2008

By DANIEL PEPPER - NEW DELHI — Myanmar is a country of uncommon beauty, full of dilapidated colonial structures slowly crumbling amid the damp swelter of the tropics, each surface and crevice losing ground to the organic pastels of mosses and molds. At night, on low stools beneath the crowded umbrellas of Yangon's downtown teashops, men sit closely and strum loud acoustic folk melodies, their songs filled with tradition rather than protest. Usually, the only things exploding are the stall piles of papayas, pineapples and mangoes in the heat.

One year ago a social upheaval, sparked by a rise in fuel prices, inspired hope that a chapter would be closing on the world's longest-running military regime. But the Buddhist clergy and common citizens were quickly beaten back with batons and bullets, and the world moved on.

Last week was the anniversary. During it, a bomb explosion in downtown Yangon wounded four; Web sites run by dissenters and exiles were attacked and shut down; and about 100 monks filed silently through the streets of a western fishing town to commemorate the crackdown. But this seems hardly dramatic enough to undo the disillusionment that set in after the defeat of the Saffron Revolution. In some ways, it only underscores it.

Two years ago — 11 months before the monks' rebellion — I sat in one of the few, cramped Internet cafes in Yangon, the former capital, and glanced at my neighbors' screens — all soft-core porn and foreign news Web sites. When I returned this summer, I found the cafes had become diverse and diffuse, packed with young people gabbing away on G-talk, checking out the social-networking sites Orkut, Hi5 and Friendster. Signs posted openly, even in small towns, explained how to circumvent government censors through proxy servers hosted at www.yoyahoo.com and www.bypassany.com.

Myanmar is like that. Change perspectives and its lost-in-time quality suddenly shifts as well, with a lurch forward. As always against the backdrop of the 2,500-year-old golden Swedegon Pagoda, teenagers now post photos on Facebook while Korean soap operas compete with English Premier League soccer for people's attention. Cellphone stores proliferate, despite the cost of new connections — \$1,500 — from the single, government-owned provider, Myanma Post and Telecommunications. (Black market connections start at about \$2,500.)

But the spirit of protest is almost silent.

In fact, the State Peace and Development Council, as the military government renamed itself in 1997, is stronger now than a year ago, having profited from high global food and fuel prices. A few signs of conspicuous consumption by the small urban middle class — satellite TV dishes, hip-hop music and fashions — are seeping down from the much smaller class of multimillionaire businessmen directly tied to the junta's chairman, Than Shwe.

Meanwhile, the broad mass of 50 million people remain among the poorest in the world. Myanmar ranks 132 out of 177 countries in the 2007 United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index. Most experts, who doubt the government's statistics, think the reality is worse.

Myanmar is also one of the only countries to be publicly denounced for human rights abuses by the otherwise confidential and neutral International Committee of the Red Cross. According to [Amnesty International](http://AmnestyInternational), more than 2,100 political prisoners languish in Myanmar's jails, about 1,000 having been locked up in the past year.

But more than ever, satellite TV and the Internet are making people aware of their government's glacial pace of progress. One young woman told me that during last year's uprisings, she was on the streets one day, shouting antigovernment slogans, and the next day stayed in, fearing a stray bullet, as she watched the blood-soaked crackdown live on [Al Jazeera](http://AlJazeera) television.

Democracy advocates in exile hold out hope that China, which is Myanmar's largest trading partner and its ally on the United Nations Security Council, could become the linchpin for changes in the regime.

But most Burmese I spoke with on my two-week visit didn't think China would ever yield to Western pleading for it to play such a role. Business with China is booming, in fact, partly because tighter Western sanctions have made the junta more dependent on China for diplomatic support, as well as arms and consumer goods.

Despite being awash in foreign currency, Myanmar's government has yet to invest heavily in manufacturing. Instead, Myanmar's big-ticket industries are based on extracting natural resources. Last year, sales of natural gas brought in about \$3 billion, sales of jade an estimated \$400 million. But the major enterprises operate in deep secrecy, and recently Transparency International once again listed Myanmar as one of the world's most corrupt countries.

In essence, the country runs like a mafia, from the languid tea shops of Yangon to the remote jungle areas of Kachin state in Upper Burma, where the mining town of Hpakant provides much of the world's jade. There I met Sai Joseph, a gregarious and entrepreneurial family man who manages one midsize jade company. "There are only a few wealthy people in Myanmar," he told me, "those who get in with the political people, the authorities who have power."

Hpakant is connected to the outside world by a single crumbling road, 16 hours through the jungle to the closest transport hub during the rainy season. Along the way abandoned wooden oxcarts litter the road between shuttered towns. Red road signs announce, like a cruel joke, "Government has arranged for road repair from each company in Hpakant."

Hpakant itself is set among denuded hills that are slowly eaten away by the mining town machinery. Green plant life bursts forth where it can among these scars, but most of the landscape is an excavation site, undulating for miles, with perhaps 3,000 separate mines. More than 450 private companies operate there, as well as about 100 joint ventures, most of them owned by Burmese of Chinese heritage. Like many once-illegal activities, jade mining now enjoys the full support of the junta, which takes a cut of the profits while leaving miners diseased and destitute. As I tried, without success, to confirm reports that jade miners are paid in heroin, I was quickly apprehended, marched back to the regional capital and eventually deported.

In one sense, things have improved in recent years. Once a scene from Dante's hell — the few outsiders who visited sometimes described thousands upon thousands of half-naked men, women and children clawing into the rock in search of jade — the mining is now a largely mechanical process executed by industrial backhoes and dump trucks. A few mines still employ human diggers, and earlier this year one such site collapsed, killing 20.

Just before the Beijing Olympics, President Bush signed the Burma Jade Act, adding Myanmar's jade and rubies to the long list of goods that cannot be imported legally to the United States. But jade sellers in Yangon largely shrugged off the ban, citing booming business with China, India, Thailand, Singapore and Arab Gulf states.

Late last month, Earth Rights International, a Thailand-based environmental and human rights organization, issued a report detailing the investments of 69 Chinese multinationals in 90 hydropower, oil, gas and mining projects. "The regime has successfully convinced these companies that nothing will compromise its grip on political power," says Matthew Smith, an Earth Rights project coordinator.

So for now, Myanmar's people struggle with their daily lives, negotiating the labyrinth of power and money. New gadgets and fashions filter through to a few people in the main cities, but even they, like the bulk of Burmese, simply work and wait, patient and passive.

Who, after all, could be expected to choose the immediate prospects of a firing squad over the distant promise of an MP3?

Daniel Pepper is a freelance journalist based in New Delhi.

Don't Forget About Burma's Democrats: A year after the Saffron Revolution, world focus has faded. [Wall Street Journal](#) – 4 October 2008

By U PYINAR ZAWTA - I am a Burmese Buddhist monk, and I am in exile. One year ago in September, the Burmese regime brutally crushed peaceful protests in my country. I was one of the monks who helped lead these protests, now known as the Saffron Revolution. The world focused on my country then, but a year later that focus has faded.

As monks, we dedicate our lives to our faith, but also to humankind. We cannot keep silent against the oppression of our fellow Burmese. We live among the people, and we know they have been struggling. Fuel and food prices are too high for many to afford. Some send their children to our monasteries just to survive. We know that millions of dollars are coming into Burma from the sale of our country's natural resources. Teak, gems, and natural gas have made the regime rich, while ordinary people go hungry.

The Burmese regime jailed me for a total of 10 years because I spoke out against injustice in our country. This January, fearing I would be imprisoned once again, I fled to Thailand. I arrived in the U.S. just one month ago. In late September, I read in the news that the Burmese regime released over 9,000 prisoners. State media described this as a sign of the rulers' "loving kindness." But the rulers know neither love, nor kindness. In Burma, anyone can be jailed for anything, anytime, anywhere.

Of the 9,000 prisoners released, only seven were prisoners of conscience. Countless others remain in jail. The poet and writer U Win Tin, who was finally released at age 79, had spent 19 years in prison for criticizing the government. We rejoice that he and six other political prisoners were released, but for this, the regime deserves no credit. These people should never have been imprisoned in the first place.

In fact, the junta rearrested one of the seven political prisoners within a few hours of his release. This follow-up story was barely noted in the international media. If the junta was sincere, it would release all of the political prisoners, including the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, student activist Min Ko Naing, party leader U Tin Oo, and all of the people who have been locked in prison for almost 20 years because they marched together in the 1988 protests.

As a former political prisoner, whose many friends and colleagues are still in jail in Burma, I want to warn the world's leaders who might think the junta has changed. Do not be fooled. As a former prisoner, I protest the immorality of using prisoner release as a tactic to win favor with the international community. The timing of this token release, coinciding with world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York, is not an accident. The regime yearns to be legitimate in the eyes of the world, and it seeks to distract the world from seeing how its brutal actions have continued since last year. It hopes to receive public praise. I urge you not to fall into the trap.

The international community must continue to press for the release of all political prisoners in Burma. It must demand real change. The Saffron Revolution has not ended.

U Pyinar Zawta, co-founder of the All Burma Monks Alliance, was until recently deputy abbot of Maggin Monastery in Rangoon, which helped organize last September's protests. He now lives in exile in the U.S.

See also: Burma's Bluff - [What the junta's 'democratic nation' would look like.](#) 09/26/08

Myanmar plans offshore oil exploration with Vietnam

[AFP](#) – 4 October 2008

YANGON — Myanmar's state oil company is to explore offshore oil and gas in a joint venture with two Vietnam companies, state media reported Saturday.

It allows the companies to explore supplies in the Gulf of Martaban, south of Myanmar in the Andaman Sea.

Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise of the Ministry of Energy signed the deal Tuesday with Petrovietnam Exploration Production Corporation Ltd and Joint Venture Vietsovpetro of the Vietnam and Eden Group Co Ltd of Myanmar, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

It allows the companies to explore supplies in the Gulf of Martaban, south of Myanmar in the Andaman Sea.

Myanmar, one of the poorest countries in the world, sells natural oil and gas to neighbouring energy hungry countries such as China and Thailand to earn much-needed foreign currency.

The United States and European countries have banned the import of Myanmar's natural resources because of its human rights record and continued detention of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962.

Myanmar leader Maung Aye to visit Bangladesh

[Xinhua](#) – 4 October 2008

YANGON -- Vice-Chairman of the Myanmar State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Maung Aye will pay an official visit to Bangladesh in the near future, said an official announcement issued from Nay Pyi Taw Saturday without giving the date of his visit.

At the invitation of Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of the Bangladesh Caretaker Government, Maung Aye, who is also Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, will pay the visit.

Maung Aye's trip will be another one to Dhaka by a Myanmar leader in more than three years since September 2005 when SPDC member General Thura Shwe Mann toured the western neighbor.

Maung Aye's planned visit came after Myanmar and Bangladesh signed an agreement in Dhaka in July 2007 to establish a 25-kilometer direct road link between the two neighbors to boost trade and tourism.

The 20 million-U.S.-dollar "Friendship Road" from Gundhum in Cox's Bazaar of Bangladesh to Baulibazar in Myanmar was also designed to connect China's Kunming under tri-nation road connectivity which will give further access to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore and to the Asian Highway.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have maintained exchange of high-level visits in recent years. In December 2002, Myanmar SPDC Chairman Senior-General Than Shwe visited Dhaka, while in 2003, Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia came to Yangon, during which the two countries signed two memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on the establishment of a joint trade commission and an agreement on coastal and maritime shipping.

According to figures of the Ministry of Commerce, bilateral trade between Myanmar and Bangladesh stood over 60 million U.S. dollars annually with the balance of trade favoring Myanmar.

The two countries are striving to increase their bilateral trade to 100 million dollars, the sources said.

18 illegal immigrants killed in crash in Turkey

[Reuters](#) - Sun Oct 5, 2008 8:16pm IST

ANKARA - A small truck carrying illegal immigrants plunged into a river after overturning on a Turkish highway near the border with Greece on Sunday, killing 18 people and injuring 25 others, Anatolian state news agency said.

It said most of the dead were from Myanmar and Pakistan. The accident happened in the town of Malkara, west of Istanbul, a local official told Anatolian.

Turkey is a major trafficking route for illegal immigrants trying to enter the European Union from southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union. They are often transported in overcrowded vehicles.

Lighting Kills Four in Naypyidaw

[Narinjara News](#) - 10/6/2008

Dhaka: Four people were killed and two others were injured on Friday when lightning struck in a village of Naypyidaw, the capital of Burma.

A state-run newspaper reported that Than Aung, 40, Maung Ko, 35, Zaw Naing Tun, 18, and shopkeeper Tin Wine, 49, were killed in the lightning strike at Gwe Gyi Village near Sin Thay Creek in Naypyidaw.

Two other individuals were taken to a hospital in Naypyidaw for treatment, the report said.

The lightning struck while the victims were sheltering in a grocery shop in the village during a heavy downpour.

After last year's Saffron Revolution protests, many people have been killed in natural disasters in Burma, including over 100,000 killed in Cyclone Nargis. Many Burmese believe such tragedies are the result of the Burmese military government having killed many monks during the demonstrations last fall.

'No regrets': Win Tin

[Straits Times/AFP](#) - Oct 5, 2008

YANGON - WITH the colour fading from his hair and lines wrinkling his face, Myanmar's newly freed political prisoner, Win Tin, still manages to defy his 79 years.

Despite suffering numerous serious ailments while locked away for 19 years in Yangon's notorious Insein prison, the former journalist remains spry and said he has never regretted his move into politics.

'I never regret leaving journalism to become a politician,' Win Tin told AFP in an interview at his friend's home where he is staying.

'The passion for informing people, for wanting their prosperity and to free them of problems is the same. Both require sacrifice. So I have no sorrow at all,' he said with a smile.

Win Tin was Myanmar's longest serving political prisoner when the military junta released more than 9,000 inmates from its jails on September 23 in an amnesty ahead of elections promised for 2010.

He became a newsman in 1949, aged 19, working as a reporter and sub-editor for national and international newspapers, and turned to politics during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising against the ruling military that has governed the country since 1962.

Win Tin was one of the founders of the pro-democracy opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party together with Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains detained at her lakeside home.

But he never witnessed the party's landslide victory in 1990 elections - a win never recognised by the junta - because he was imprisoned in July 1989 for his role as Aung San Suu Kyi's advisor, and for his letters to the then-United Nations envoy to Myanmar.

Nineteen years locked away have taken their toll on Win Tin's health. He now suffers from heart disease, a hernia, and has lung and eye problems, yet he said he will continue to work for the NLD.

'I have no health problems recently. I have to keep my spirits strong,' he said.

He said he was tortured in prison - hooded during long interrogations, deprived of sleep and subjected to beatings. He had been kept in solitary confinement since 1996, only seeing his family for 15 minutes every fortnight.

On his release last month the NLD welcomed him to their 20th anniversary meeting, chanting 'Long Live U Win Tin' as he arrived.

The NLD ruling committee invited him to rejoin the board, and while he has not yet decided to accept, he said he will stay in politics.

'I'm now a politician. I have to continue my duties inevitably,' he said.

'I have my duty as I founded a political party, I cannot leave it. I had to apply my beliefs and spirit during my 19 years in prison.' Campaigners say around 2,000 dissidents remain in Myanmar's prisons and Win Tin now wants to focus on their release.

'Many people have sacrificed their lives. Many people are still in prisons.

I can not tolerate my sorrow for these people,' Win Tin said.

'We have to continue our mission. We have to acknowledge their gratitude, sacrifice and fighting,' he said.

'I have told the authorities they can re-arrest me if they do not like what I am saying.' But Win Tin believes dialogue between the authorities and the pro-democracy group is the best way to secure the prisoners' release and pursue democratic reforms ahead of 2010 elections.

The junta won a widely-criticised national referendum in May, allowing the government to change the constitution and paving the way for 2010 elections that bar Aung San Suu Kyi from standing. She has been under house arrest for most of the past two decades.

Win Tin said he would seek the help of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon in pushing for the prisoners' release and securing talks with the junta, when he visits Myanmar in December.

'Dialogue is the only way forward ahead of 2010 (elections). If the elections go ahead as planned, it cannot be a success,' he said. -- AFP

In Myanmar crisis, an old dissident sees hope:

'I trust the power of the people,' says Ludu Sein Win, who spent 13 years in jail, but is heartened by the outpouring of help to cyclone victims by young people in defiance of the military regime.

[LA Times](#), October 4, 2008

From a Times Staff Writer

YANGON, MYANMAR — Every breath he takes is a struggle.

Locked in a cell, held without charge because he condemned one of the military government's many brutal assaults on dissent, Ludu Sein Win suffered a stroke 28 years ago. It withered his body, but his defiant voice is still strong.

Still producing opinion pieces scrawled in shaky longhand, the journalist and author nimbly dodges censors by writing under 15 pseudonyms.

On a recent afternoon, he sat on the edge of his bed, steadying himself with frail hands pressed flat against a thin mattress.

Every few words, he paused, and pursed his lips. With all the fight left in him, Sein Win, 69, forced his lungs to wheeze in oxygen pumped through the clear plastic tube that tethers him to a machine softly bubbling at his bedside.

"I have never witnessed a dictator voluntarily relinquishing his power," said Sein Win, who was imprisoned from 1967 to 1980. "The only way to oust this regime is by force."

Many have been locked up for saying much less since the military seized control of the nation 46 years ago. Yet Sein Win refuses to be cowed. He's drawing new strength from what he calls the formidable force of young people who defied the regime to aid the victims of Tropical Cyclone Nargis.

Many believe that the surge of volunteer spirit among young people, and even well-known entertainers, and the subsequent anger over the government's fumbling response to the cyclone have served to strengthen the pro-democracy movement.

But the May disaster also gave the regime a breather. Activists say the 20th anniversary of a 1988 student-led uprising is passing without large demonstrations because they want to focus on helping cyclone victims.

That could change suddenly, some predict, if the cost of rice, fuel and other basic needs remains high.

The cyclone brought pummeling winds and surges of seawater that killed at least 85,000 people, mainly in the southern delta region. Thousands more are still missing, bringing the estimated death toll to 110,000. Five months later, the United Nations says more than 2.1 million survivors depend on food aid and other assistance.

The government relief effort was slow and bungled, and authorities tried to trip up local and foreign aid workers eager to fill the breach. Still, thousands of volunteers, mostly young people, loaded up cars, trucks and boats and headed to the cyclone zone, pushing past checkpoints set up to stop them.

When supplies ran out, they went home with photos and stories that shattered the official line that the ruling generals had everything under control. The volunteers' ranks swelled, along with donations, and the myth of an invincible regime faded a little more.

"I trust the power of the people, and Nargis showed I'm right," Sein Win said.

"If we can properly use this united force of young people, we can easily topple this regime."

Sein Win believes that the people of Myanmar, also known as Burma, have the courage required to bring down the generals.

A year ago, the generals crushed any hopes of a peaceful transition to democracy when security forces opened fire on peaceful protesters, killing at least 31 and jailing thousands more. U.N. efforts to broker an accord between the generals and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi have also failed. Suu Kyi led her National League for Democracy to a landslide election victory in 1990, but the generals rejected the results and threw her in jail. She remains under house arrest.

In mid-August, when U.N. special envoy Ibrahim Gambari made his fourth mediation visit since the crackdown in September 2007, Suu Kyi refused to see him.

According to reports, Gambari's officials shouted over a bullhorn at Suu Kyi's back wall for more than three hours over two days in a failed attempt to speak with her.

With the country's most popular leader silent, Myanmar's people are waiting for someone to rally opposition to the generals.

The regime couldn't stop private relief operations. But its generals still seem determined to keep the volunteers off balance.

Zarganar, a popular comedian banned from the stage for lampooning the regime, led a volunteer cyclone relief operation until authorities jailed him on June 4 for publicly criticizing government aid efforts.

Even movie star Kyaw Thu, an idol to millions, and his wife, Shwe Zee Kwet, have faced difficulty in their efforts to provide disaster aid.

The couple were among the first to mobilize a relief mission through their charity, the [Free Funeral Services Society](#). Like other aid groups, it couldn't get enough trucks and boats to move food and medicine fast and far enough.

The military refused to provide transportation, said Shwe Zee Kwet. "Relief didn't get there soon enough and people died because of that."

The stature of Kyaw Thu and his wife grew last fall when they were imprisoned and interrogated for a week because they delivered food and water to Buddhist monks leading anti-government protests.

Authorities banned him from making movies, so he now devotes his time to the sick and disadvantaged.

In August, Kyaw Thu was ordered to move his charity's headquarters from the Buddhist monastery where its 51 staff members, and 100 volunteers, have worked since 2001. The government offered a new site, but hasn't issued building permits.

"They say the people of this township don't want us here," his wife said. "How can that be? They are happy because they can come to our clinic every day and get everything free here."

Others, such as Sein Win, have found ways to work around the government's restrictions. Since the generals have banned Sein Win from publishing his work, he uses pen names and allegory to straighten things out in opinion pieces that have appeared in about two dozen local weeklies and magazines.

"We use many metaphors, and tricks, to outsmart the censor board," he said.

In one opinion piece, Sein Win says, he took a stealthy shot at the generals by condemning the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Using one of the government's favorite targets to his advantage, Sein Win called President Bush a cowboy more willing to shoot than seek peaceful political solutions.

"Burmese people know too well what I mean," the writer said. "I'm urging people to use the language of the gun. Don't waste our time on proposals from the United Nations, this 'dialogue,' this 'national reconciliation.' "

The walls of Sein Win's home are decorated with washed-out posters of roses and lined by high shelves stuffed with hundreds of books. Thousands more are stacked in the loft above his bed. They satisfy an eclectic taste; they include titles on art and poetry, a Che Guevara biography and "The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell."

The stroke he suffered while in prison, where he spent several years in solitary confinement in a 10-by-12-foot cell, has left Sein Win paralyzed on his right side. His heart and lungs are failing. He has been on an oxygen machine for three years.

Yet Sein Win thinks his poor health is his best advantage over the generals.

"They think I'm a dying old man, sitting in his house 24 hours a day," he said, smiling with disdain. "They don't want to be blamed if I die in prison."

"I'm not a brave man," he added. "But one person must be foolish enough to speak out about what's really happening here. Only then will the world know the real situation."

Low-profile UN chief struggles as diplomatic peacemaker: Ban is humbled in efforts to prod foreign leaders

[Washington Post](#) | September 29, 2008

By Colum Lynch, UNITED NATIONS - In the days after Georgian and Russian troops marched into the separatist province of South Ossetia, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon frantically telephoned key leaders and offered the United Nations' diplomatic help in stemming further violence. But Russian President Dmitry Medvedev refused to take his calls for more than a week, say senior US and UN officials.

The rebuff highlighted Russia's displeasure with Ban, who had clashed with Moscow over Kosovo's independence drive and riled it again by issuing a statement supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia, a nation Russia intended to carve up.

It also provided another example of the humbling struggles of the world's top diplomat to prod foreign leaders to embrace peace.

After more than 20 months in office, Ban is straining to make his mark as a diplomatic peacemaker as his efforts to stem bloodshed in Sudan's Darfur region have faltered and Burma's political players refuse to meet with his special envoy. The United Nations has been relegated to a supporting role in many of the world's diplomatic flare-ups, including in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Ban convened a meeting of key foreign ministers recently on the sidelines of the General Assembly session to energize efforts to press Burma's generals to democratize the country and to secure the release of nearly 2,000 political prisoners, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

But the meeting, which Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did not attend, produced no breakthrough, and Ban canceled plans to speak to the media. Instead Ban issued a statement, pressing Burma to release the prisoners.

Behind the scenes, Ban has resisted calls from the United States, Britain, Singapore and other countries to travel to Burma to meet with military ruler Senior General Than Shwe in December, fearing it might end in failure. There is a risk of Ban "going and coming back empty-handed," a close aide said.

"No one is going to make a case that we are in the middle of a big diplomatic breakthrough on some of these cases you've mentioned," said Robert Orr, a special adviser to Ban. "But the fact is that is not the nature of this business. These things move quietly until they break into the open. The secretary general's style is to work very hard, persistently, behind the scenes" to achieve that.

Orr and other UN officials say Ban has had far greater success in prodding governments on some long-term threats such as climate change and the global food and energy crises and in helping to secure billions of dollars in commitments to fight poverty during the world's worst financial crisis in a generation.

They say his persistence paid off after Tropical Cyclone Nargis in May, when he traveled to Yangon, the former Burmese capital, to persuade Than Shwe to pry open the borders for relief workers.

But Ban has been pushed into the background in Africa, where local powers have taken the lead in solving regional problems. South Africa effectively blocked a US and British initiative to grant the UN a more central role in mediating an end to an election crisis in Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe cracked down on opposition leaders to prevent his more popular rival, Morgan Tsvangirai, from winning the election.

At the height of the crisis, Mugabe told Ban to butt out of his country's affairs and accused him of carrying water for the region's formal colonial power. But Mugabe ultimately agreed to a compromise that gave the UN a supporting role in a diplomatic process led by his friend Thabo Mbeki, who was South Africa's president at the time.

Ban's low-profile diplomatic style contrasts with the activism of his predecessor, Kofi Annan, a Ghanaian national who sought to expand the authority of the office.

At a similar stage in his tenure, Annan had carried out a high-profile trip to Baghdad, where he temporarily averted a US-led air war by persuading Saddam Hussein to open his presidential palaces to

UN inspectors. That peace was short-lived, and the United States and Britain launched Operation Desert Fox, a four-day air assault against Iraq, several months later in 1998.

In Darfur, Ban has been in control, cultivating a relationship with Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir to help secure support for a UN-African Union peacekeeping mission and a political settlement. But fighting has resumed, political talks have stalled, and the peacekeepers' deployment is months behind schedule.

The setbacks have begun to take a toll on Ban, who lashed out at his senior advisers during a retreat in Turin, Italy, for failing to make the organization more responsive to the challenges of the day.

"Our job is to change the UN - and through it, the world," Ban told his staff members last month. "This is the big picture. I am frustrated by our failure, so often, to see it

Nuclear bond for North Korea and Myanmar

[The Asia Times](#) – 4 October 2008

By Norman Robespierre YANGON - A recent flurry of high-level contacts between North Korea and Myanmar raises new nuclear proliferation concerns between the two pariah states, one of which already possesses nuclear-weapon capabilities and the other possibly aspiring.

At least three delegations led by flag-level officers from Myanmar's army have traveled to Pyongyang in the past three months, hot on the heels of the two sides' re-establishment last year of formal diplomatic relations. According to a source familiar with the travel itineraries of Myanmar officials, Brigadier General Aung Thein Lin visited North Korea in mid-September.

Before that, other Myanmar military delegations visited North Korea, including a group headed in August by Lieutenant General Tin Aye, chief of the Office of Chief Defense Industries, and another led in July by Lieutenant General Myint Hlaing, the chief of Air Defence.

The rapid-fire visits have gone beyond goodwill gestures and the normal diplomatic niceties of re-establishing ties. Rather, the personalities involved in the visits indicate that Myanmar is not only seeking weapons procurements, but also probable cooperation in establishing air defense weaponry, missiles, rockets or artillery production facilities.

The secretive visits are believed to entail a Myanmar quest for tunneling technology and possible assistance in developing its nascent nuclear program. Tin Aye and Myint Hlaing, by virtue of their positions as lieutenant generals, are logical choices to head official delegations in search of weapons technology for Myanmar's military, while Brigadier General Aung Thein Lin, current mayor of Yangon and chairman of the city's development committee, was formerly deputy minister of Industry-2, responsible for all industrial development in the country.

Prior to 1998, the minister of Industry-2 also served as the chairman of the Myanmar Atomic Energy Committee. This came to an end when Myanmar's Atomic Energy Act of 1998 designated the Ministry of Science and Technology as the lead government agency for its aspirant nuclear program. However, the Ministry of Industry-2, by virtue of its responsibilities for construction of industrial facilities and the provision of equipment, continues to play a key supporting role in Myanmar's nuclear program.

Myanmar's stagnant nuclear program was revitalized shortly after Pakistan's first detonation of nuclear weapons in May 1998. Senior general and junta leader Than Shwe signed the Atomic Energy Law on June 8, 1998, and the timing of the legislation so soon after Pakistan's entry into the nuclear club did little to assuage international concerns about Myanmar's nuclear intentions. Some analysts believe the regime may eventually seek nuclear weapons for the dual purpose of international prestige and strategic deterrence.

Myanmar's civilian-use nuclear ambitions made global headlines in early 2001, when Russia's Atomic Energy Committee indicated it was planning to build a research reactor in the country. The following year, Myanmar's deputy foreign minister, Khin Maung Win, publicly announced the regime's decision to build a nuclear research reactor, citing the country's difficulty in importing radio-isotopes and the need for modern technology as reasons for the move.

The country reportedly sent hundreds of soldiers for nuclear training in Russia that same year and the reactor was scheduled for delivery in 2003. However, the program was shelved due to financial difficulties and a formal contract for the reactor, under which Russia agreed to build a nuclear research center along with a 10 megawatt reactor, was not signed until May 2007.

The reactor will be fueled with non-weapons grade enriched uranium-235 and it will operate under the purview of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog. The reactor itself would be ill-suited for weapons development. However, the training activities associated with it would provide the basic knowledge required as a foundation for any nuclear weapons development program outside of the research center.

Constrained reaction

The United States' reaction to Myanmar's nuclear developments has been somewhat constrained, despite the George W Bush administration referring to the military-run country as an "outpost of tyranny".

After Myanmar's 2002 confirmation of its intent to build the reactor, the US warned the country of its obligations as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). After the contract was formally announced in May 2007, the US State Department expressed concerns about the country's lack of adequate safety standards and the potential for proliferation.

The warming and growing rapport between Myanmar and North Korea will likely further heighten Washington's proliferation concerns. Myanmar broke off diplomatic relations with Pyongyang in 1983, after North Korean agents bombed the Martyr's mausoleum in Yangon in an attempt to assassinate the visiting South Korean president, Chun Doo-hwan.

The explosion killed more than 20 people, mostly South Korean officials, including the deputy prime minister and the foreign minister, and the South Korean ambassador to Myanmar. Four Myanmar nationals perished and dozens more were wounded in the blast. Myanmar severed ties with North Korea after an investigation revealed the three agents responsible for planting the bomb spent the night at a North Korean diplomat's house before setting out on their mission.

However, common interests have brought the two secretive nations back together. The famine in North Korea in the late 1990s and Myanmar's military expansion ambitions, including a drive for self-sufficiency in production, have fostered recent trade flows. While Myanmar has the agricultural surplus to ease North Korean hunger, Pyongyang possesses the weapons and technological know-how needed to boost Yangon's military might. There is also speculation Myanmar might provide uranium, mined in remote and difficult-to-monitor areas, to North Korea.

As testament to Pyongyang's willingness to supply weapons to the military regime, more North Korean ship visits have been noted at Thilawa port in Yangon, one of the country's primary receipt points for military cargo. During one of these visits in May 2007, two Myanmar nationals working for Japan's News Network were detained outside Yangon while covering a suspected arms delivery by a North Korean vessel.

Growing bilateral trade has helped to heal old diplomatic wounds and eventually led to a joint communique re-establishing diplomatic relations in April 2007. The emerging relationship is also a natural outgrowth of the ostracism each faces in the international arena, including the economic sanctions imposed and maintained against them by the West.

While it is possible the recent visits are related to Myanmar's nascent nuclear program, the evidence is far from conclusive. Nevertheless, Myanmar has undoubtedly taken notice of the respect that is accorded to North Korea on the world stage because of its nuclear weapon status. Unlike North Korea, Myanmar is a signatory to the NPT.

Myanmar has publicly stated it seeks nuclear technology only for peaceful purposes, such as developing radio-isotopes for agricultural use and medical research. Yet two well-placed sources told this reporter that North Korean and Iranian technicians were already advising Myanmar on a possible secret nuclear effort, running in parallel to the aboveboard Russia-supported program. Asia Times Online could not independently confirm the claim.

The lack of participation by Myanmar's Ministry of Science and Technology in the recent trips to Pyongyang would seem to indicate that nuclear developments were probably not the primary focus of the high-level meetings. The regime is also known to be interested in North Korea's tunneling technology (see [Myanmar and North Korea share a tunnel vision](#), Asia Times Online, July 19, 2006) in line with the ruling junta's siege mentality and apparent fears of a possible US-led pre-emptive military attack.

The junta and others have no doubt noted the extraordinary problems tunneling and cave complexes have caused US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the success North Korea has enjoyed in hiding underground its nuclear facilities. Bunkers are rumored to underlie several buildings at Naypyidaw, where the regime abruptly moved the national capital in 2005. The ongoing construction of a second capital, for the hot season, at Yadanapon, is also believed to have tunnels and bunkers integrated into its layout.

Whether the visits are related to arms procurement, military industrial development, tunneling technology or nuclear exchange, they foreshadow a potentially dangerous trend for Myanmar's non-nuclear Southeast Asian neighbors and their Western allies, including the US.

As the true nature of the budding bilateral relationship comes into closer view, the risk is rising that Pyongyang and Yangon are conspiring to create a security quandary in Southeast Asia akin to the one now vexing the US and its allies on the Korean Peninsula.

Norman Robespierre, a pseudonym, is a freelance journalist specializing in Sino-Asian affairs.

COMMENTARY: Where Would Burma Be without Suu Kyi?

[Irrawaddy](#) - Friday, October 3, 2008

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most people would prefer not to think of Burma's future without Suu Kyi. Her absence from politics would probably be a death blow to the already weakened democracy struggle, because she has no obvious successor as leader of the movement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She has the rare ability to speak to the generals in a straightforward, unflinching manner. Indeed, her power derives almost entirely from what she calls "plain honesty in politics." Her courage, dedication and

steadfast adherence to the truth have empowered her to speak for the people of Burma in a way that no one else can at this point in the country's history.

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

This article appeared in the October issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Eye Specialist Calls on Suu Kyi

[Irrawaddy](#) - Friday, October 3, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING - A medical specialist visited pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her Rangoon home on Thursday and conducted an eye examination. No details of Suu Kyi's condition were released.

Nyan Win, spokesman of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), told The Irrawaddy on Friday that Dr Kan Nyunt visited the detained NLD leader together with her regular physician, Dr Tin Myo Win.

Kan Nyunt spent one hour with Suu Kyi, while Tin Myo Win remained longer, Nyan Win reported. He said he didn't know why Suu Kyi's eyesight had been tested.

The head of the UN office in Rangoon, Navanethem Pillay, called on the Burmese military government on Thursday to release Suu Kyi and other political detainees, estimated to number more than 2,000.

Suu Kyi has spent more than 13 of the past 19 years under house arrest at her Rangoon lakeside home. Her current five year term was illegally extended by one year in May.

In a protest against the extension and the conditions of her detention, Suu Kyi refused to accept deliveries of food and household supplies from mid-August. She relaxed her stand in September after the regime agreed to allow her deliveries of private mail and foreign magazines.

UN calls for the release of Myanmar's political prisoners

[AFP](#) - 2 October 2008

GENEVA — The new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called for the release of Myanmar's political prisoners Thursday as she launched a 'justice and dignity' week for detainees around the world.

"We believe that there are still 2,000 political prisoners in Myanmar," said Pillay in her first press conference since taking office.

"We are asking the authorities in Rangoon to free them," she added.

Last week, she welcomed the release of seven political prisoners there.

The High Commissioner also called the detention of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi "completely illegal, even in respect of the country's law."

Pillay also highlighted the plight of detainees in other countries.

"The number of people around the world who are believed to be held in some form of detention that is unjust or inappropriate probably runs into the millions," said Pillay.

"Every day around the world, there are hundreds of new cases of men, women and children being placed in detention, when they shouldn't be, sometimes in atrocious conditions," she added.

The South African lawyer, who has served as a judge with the International Criminal Court and as Judge President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, became UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September.

Myanmar, Kachin rebels oppose dams on Chinese border

AsiaNews – 02 October 2008

The pro-independence group denounces the population's lack of involvement in the construction of new hydroelectric plants. They have blocked the work, but have withdrawn their militias after the payment of a "tax". Environmentalists fear possible damage to the ecosystem.

Yangon - The Kachin pro-independence movement is opposing the construction of a series of hydroelectric dams along the northern border between Myanmar and China. This is revealed by sources close to the ethnic rebel group which, despite signing a peace agreement with the Burmese junta in 1994, exercises substantial control over the area and frequently engages in armed clashes with government troops.

The Kachin denounce their lack of involvement in the agreement, signed in 2007, between the ruling dictatorship and executives of the multinational China Datang Corporation; the agreement provides for the construction of nine hydroelectric plants along the Chinese border.

Tension broke out two weeks ago over the refusal on the part of Chinese authorities to pay a sort of "construction tax" to the leaders of the ethnic rebels; in response, the rebels sent militia groups to the construction sites to block work on the dams. Tarpein 1 and Tarpein 2 are the first two in a series of nine dams planned by the Burmese energy ministry, in collaboration with Chinese companies.

Sources close to the pro-independence movement confirm that the work resumed a week ago, after the payment of 1.5 million yuan (a little more than 220,000 dollars) by executives of the construction companies. The agreement was overseen by the new commander of the northern brigade, General Soe Win, who mediated between the parties, permitting work to resume.

In addition to the economic interests and control of the territory involved, the Burmese-Chinese project has unleashed protests from environmentalists who are afraid of serious repercussions for the environment. "The fear", reveals environmental expert Naw La in interview with the Irrawaddy, "is that the local population is not being involved in the project, and must pay the consequences. The benefits will go only to the Burmese government and to the Chinese companies, while the inhabitants of the villages will suffer serious damage from deforestation and flooding".

The most important of the nine hydroelectric plants being built is the one in Myitsone: it will be located 42 kilometers north of Myitkyina, capital of the state of Kachin, and will produce about 3,600 megawatts of electricity.

COMMENTARY: The Strange World of Burma's Home Affairs Minister

[Irrawaddy](#) - Thursday, October 2, 2008

By AUNG ZAW - Is Burma's Home Affairs Minister Maj Gen Maung Oo paranoid, does he really believe the tall stories he tells to his staff—or is he just making them up to scare nervous officials?

The question arises from a reading of the minutes of a confidential meeting addressed by the minister, a fascinating document leaked to The Irrawaddy and which should be studied by any aid agencies hoping to open offices in Burma.

There's no doubt that his remarks were heavily influenced by Snr Gen Than Shwe's secret cabinet meetings, which are usually held at night at the defense ministry compound.

He talked at length about international politics and the global balance of power, warning that the US had long-term imperialist ambitions but also calling for Burma to balance its relations with the world's superpowers because of what he described as the country's delicate situation.

He maintained that the EU is allied with the US, with Burma as their target. He didn't mention a recent survey concluding that the EU's policies on Burma and Darfur had failed.

Despite his attacks on the US and the EU, Maung Oo said Burma had no enemies and had to act according to each circumstance. “Whether a big nation or a small nation, they cannot stand alone,” he said.

Allies of the US, such as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were encircling China, he said. Burma was China’s route out of this encirclement because of its opening to the sea, he added—while declaring: “We are not pro-China.”

Maung Oo saw the presence of the US Central Intelligence everywhere. From Mongolia to Burma—even in the cyclone-devastated Irrawaddy delta. “They [the CIA] are also inside the country [Burma],” he warned his staff.

The CIA was even behind aid work in Cambodia, he charged, citing Prime Minister Hun Sen. UN and nongovernmental agencies spent relief money on themselves, leaving the Cambodians with rubbish, he charged. The aid agencies were lackeys and followers of the CIA, he declared.

Elaborating on US international policy, Maung Oo said Washington had two cards in its hands—one humanitarian and the other democracy. US criticism of “what happened inside the prisons, to the monks and student activists” was countered by the support Burma received from China, so Washington turned to the UN, he said.

Maung Oo said that when the US failed at the UN to bring down Burma’s government, it resorted to using UN agencies to raise social, health, humanitarian and human security issues.

The minister claimed the US had tried to sow fear of a health and humanitarian disaster after Cyclone Nargis hit Burma in May, while also looking for excuses to infiltrate Burma by using the UN and the “Responsibility to Protect” paradigm as part of an agenda to accuse the regime of “crimes against humanity.”

US requests to allow its ships to deliver aid to the Irrawaddy delta had been denied because government leaders believed the US military would find an excuse not to leave until after the 2010 elections, Maung Oo confirmed.

More importantly, the paranoid minister said, aid workers “brought in much communication equipment without government approval.... People also come to the delta on tourist visas.”

INGOs and UN agencies employed opposition party members, anti-government activists and students to go and work in the delta, he charged.

Maung Oo admitted that the government had tried to prevent aid agencies from entering the delta—“But they came with many excuses to help people. It was just for show and they were just corrupt and stealing (aid money) for themselves over this crisis.”

Aid had not been directed through the government, which hadn’t had a chance to monitor accounts and the expenditures of INGOs, he complained.

“We are feeding over 60,000 people everyday (in the delta) but no one has recognized this so far.” Requests for instant foods, clean water and building materials had either been rejected or ignored by INGOs, Maung Oo charged.

He accused INGOs of trying to build up strongholds in the delta, where large numbers of Karen live, because across the Thai border, in Mae Sot, there were refugee camps operating resettlement program.

Implying that refugees from the delta would be seeking to join the resettlement program, Maung Oo said: “Relying on Karen and Karenni, they [INGOs] are building a cell in the delta.”

In his remarks, the minister also offered the assurance that the police would play a pivotal role in any future anti-government demonstrations in Burma. He said he had visited a shooting range to inspect police equipment, assuring his staffers that the law would be enforced according to “international standards.”

I suggest Maung Oo should enroll in the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, which hones true leadership skills according to real “international standards.”

UN teams up with Myanmar Government to advocate safe infant feeding

[UN News Centre](#) - 1 October 2008

The United Nations and the Government of Myanmar are pushing for safe infant feeding practices, as efforts continue to respond to the crisis of melamine-contaminated milk products in China which has driven over 54,000 children to seek medical treatment.

Given the possibility that melamine-contaminated products have spread to other countries, Myanmar's Ministry of Health has implemented a search for contaminated milk formula in the market, initiated testing for melamine in dairy products and increased surveillance for affected children via pediatricians.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have joined the Ministry in advocating that all infants should be fed exclusively with breast milk for the first six months of life, a health measure that could potentially prevent the deaths of millions of children each year.

In promoting safe feeding for infants, they also noted the need to work together with the private sector regarding the Code on Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, which includes no advertising of breast milk substitutes to families, no promotion and no free distribution of products through health care facilities, and no words or pictures idealizing artificial feed.

As part of its response to the contamination crisis, WHO yesterday [issued](#) preliminary guidance to help authorities decide on the health concerns of melamine levels in food.

Melamine – commonly used in such materials as containers and labels, and sometimes found in agricultural products such as fertilizer – was deliberately added to raw milk for several months to boost its apparent protein content, according to WHO.

When Burmese citizenship is no longer attractive

[Mizzima](#) - Friday, 03 October 2008 15:18

by John Moe - Surrendering one's Burmese citizenship is growing in frequency among the Burmese community in Singapore; and it is a phenomenon that looks to continue to gain momentum as graduates from Burma are increasingly forced to look for jobs overseas given the dire employment market in their native country.

In the years since the 1988 democracy uprising more and more Burmese have left the country, with many making their way to ASEAN neighbors. And out of all the ASEAN countries, the island city-state of Singapore has arguably become the destination of choice for the more enlightened segments of Burmese society forced to go abroad.

Students from Burma, upon completion of their studies, often have difficulty in procuring a good career job. Graduates worry about their economic future under the current military government. And a growing jobless rate, in combination with nervousness revolving around the future of many industries, leads them to a decision to seek their fortunes beyond Burma's borders.

Once overseas, for a myriad of reasons, many Burmese find the prospect of returning to Burma – and resettling in the former capital of Rangoon or the newly crowned political epicenter of Naypyitaw – unattractive.

Immersed in an amalgamation of the educated and uneducated and an ethnic patchwork representing Burma's various communities, many Burmese arrivals to Singapore find that their lives change dramatically – often for the better. Burmese, with a strong work ethic, quickly assimilate and warm to their new jobs. And even if not a fully liberal democratic nation, the Burmese exist within a Singaporean society that blends both religions and races.

Burmese living in the Lion City relish their newly found earning power and appreciate the freedoms found in Singapore that do not exist back in Burma, such as the freedom and respect shown toward religious practice and equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic background. In contrast to their life in

Singapore, Burmese recall the Burmese junta's treatment of Buddhist monks following last year's Saffron Revolution, when members of the clergy were subjected to arrest and torture, their monasteries raided.

Meanwhile, Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, publicly welcomes foreign talent and has taken a progressive step by encouraging all Singaporeans to accept immigrants with open arms and recognize their contributions to Singapore's economy and society.

However, there is also a certain degree of alienation associated with the Burmese community in Singapore, as represented by young people who are unable to attain traditional Burmese values, customs and culture growing up in the city-state.

But the simple truth is that many Burmese prefer to surrender their national identity and live beyond the reach of Burma's military rulers, while Burma's military government conceals the number of Burmese who choose to forfeit their citizenship.

U Kyaw Win, 52, an Assistant Project Manager, abandoned his Burmese citizenship and became a Singaporean citizen. "The reason I converted my citizenship is that I had made a decision based on the further education of my children. And also I wanted to get rid of the problem of double taxation. Now I need to pay only one country's taxes," explained U Kyaw Win.

Generally speaking, when considering whether or not to sacrifice their Burmese citizenship, most parents site their children's education and career possibilities as their top priorities in reaching a verdict. But the elimination of double taxation is also a real concern, as each family has to pay a huge amount of money to the Burmese Embassy if the entire family has been working; while nationals over 21 years of age have to pay tax according to their income.

From a patriotic point of view, surrendering one's citizenship is a contentious issue. Ultimately, Burmese who repudiate their Burmese citizenship pledge their allegiance to a new national oath, sing a new national anthem and acquire a passport that reads 'Singapore'.

However, Burmese Singaporean citizens can never entirely break free of their former national identity and the abusive diktats of the ruling generals in Naypyitaw. As former citizens, they are forced to pay double visa fees if ever they wish to return to visit their native country.

Burma's economy: Does sanctions hinder development?

[Mizzima](#) - Thursday, 02 October 2008 22:01

by Mungpi - New Delhi - Poverty and the slow-pace of economic development in Burma, which was once known as the 'Rice Bowl' of Southeast Asia, is not the result of the current economic sanctions imposed by western nations but because of the ruling junta's mismanagement and inept economic decision making, said an economic expert.

Sean Turnell, Associate Professor and member of the Burma Economic Watch, at the Economics Department of Macquarie University in Sydney said he disagrees with the Burmese Foreign Minister's statement that sanctions have hindered economic development in Burma.

Nyan Win, in his address to the UN General Assembly in New York on Monday, called for an end to what he described as 'immoral sanctions' against his country, saying sanctions hamper economic development and harm the people.

Nyan Win, in his speech, said sanctions are "unwarranted," and "They are not only unfair but immoral. They are counter-productive and deprive countries of their right to development."

But Sean, a long time observer of Burmese economy, said Burma's economy is hardest hit by the junta's mismanagement and its self-imposed isolation.

"Burma's poverty is not a result of sanctions, but 45 years of extraordinarily inept economic decision making by Burma's military regimes," Sean said in an email to Mizzima.

He added that the regime has self-imposed sanctions by creating an economic environment that makes international investment, in true productive industry, utterly impossible.

The United States and the European Union have recently stepped up sanctions against Burma's military government for its suppression of pro-democracy groups and its refusal to improve the situation of human rights including the release of political prisoners.

However, the Burmese Foreign Minister, in his speech said, for Burma to be able to implement economic development, it needs "unfettered access" to markets, modern technology and investment, which according to him has been deprived to Burma due to the imposition of sanctions.

"The sooner the unjust sanctions are revoked and the barriers removed, the sooner will the country be in a position to become the rice bowl of the region and a reliable source of energy," he added.

Economic development without sanctions?

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese analyst based in Thailand, said while lifting economic sanctions cannot improve Burma's economy over-night, it will, however, allow space for development in the long-run.

According to him, Burma, which has been isolated for nearly half a century and suffered nearly two decades of economic sanctions, a 'command economy' is prevailing, whereby the ruling generals dictate the economy and provide opportunities only to their cronies.

He said, therefore, lifting sanctions and allowing free flow of direct foreign investments, in the long run, would help open up new space for development as well as create new political space.

He added that economic sanctions, which the opposition group led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have called for and was imposed by the US and EU, does not encourage political reconciliation in Burma.

The Burmese junta is annoyed with the west because of the sanctions but are even more so on the opposition led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for urging the west to impose sanctions, he said.

"[T]here has been a sore relationship between the junta and the opposition. So, international sanctions are an obstacle to reconciliation," Aung Naing Oo said.

However, he said, unless the junta drops its 'Command Economy', cronyism, and corruption, lifting sanctions will not help in developing the economy.

But Nyo Ohn Myint, the foreign affairs in-charge of the National League for Democracy – Liberated Area (NLD-LA), said sanctions have its causes and effects, but the deteriorating economic situation in Burma is mainly caused by the junta's corruption, nepotism and cronyism.

Nyo Ohn Myint, who closely monitors Burmese economy, said western sanctions does not put on hold the possibility of foreign investment, which mostly are from neighbouring countries including members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

But he said, Burma failed to attract foreign investors due to the lack of political stability, and transparency, which investors see as an unhealthy atmosphere for business deals.

"Despite the sanctions, we see that Burma's bilateral trade with neighbouring countries like India and China are increasing," Nyo Ohn Myint said.

Even with sanctions imposed by US and EU, there are several companies still operating in Burma, Nyo Ohn Myint said, but he added that that the junta's failure to demonstrate stability and mismanagement of the economy has slowed down Burma's economic development.

According to Sean, sanctions by any means are "not a full solution" they are, however, useful in an array of strategies.

"Often overlooked is that sanctions can be an avenue, through their progressive lifting, for sponsoring genuine reforms," he added.

Despite the sanctions Burma has several opportunities to implement economic development, Sean said, adding that Burma can still "bring about wholesale reform - especially in the areas of property rights and rational decision-making."

But under the current circumstance corporates and companies are "hardly going to invest in a place where expropriation is a real possibility, where poverty is such that a viable market is barely achievable, and where corruption imposes such high a 'tax' on genuine activity," Sean said.

Llyod's writes to all agents to 'reconsider' business deals with Burma

[Mizzima](#) - Thursday, 02 October 2008 20:48

by Solomon - New Delhi - UK's leading insurance marketplace, Lloyd's of London, said it has written to all its managing agents to reconsider their business involvement with Burma's military junta.

Louise Shield, Head of Communications of Lloyd's, told Mizzima that the marketplace's chairman has received a letter from the British Government's Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) stating its disapproval over the market's involvement with Burma.

"We have been asking the government for guidance on doing business in Burma, and now we have received a letter. And we are writing to all our managing agents," Shield said.

But Shield said, the market's businesses in Burma are not significant and pulling out of the country will not have much impact on the market.

"We have very small amount of insurance business [in Burma]," said Shield. "Probably there is no significant effect in our business."

The response of Lloyd's of London, a leading marketplace in England dealing in reinsurance business, came after campaigners urged several insurance companies across the world to stop dealing with the Burmese military junta, as the regime is profiting from them.

Burma Campaign UK, a group advocating for human rights and democracy in Burma, has named 16 insurance companies including Lloyd's of London, Hannover Re, Catlin, Atrium, XL, Tokio Marine, Sompo Japan and Mitsui Sumitomo as groups having business dealings with the junta.

BCUK, in its report 'Insuring the generals' released in July said, these companies and insurers are providing billions of dollars to the Burmese military regime that is infamously known for repressing its citizens.

Johnny Chatterton, Campaigns Officer of BCUK said, "We welcome the impact of the government's letter, they [Lloyd's of London] now have to write to the entire marketplace."

Chatterton said, while a few other leading insurance companies of the world have pulled out of Burma, Lloyd's has turned a deaf ear to the call made by him and his colleagues to cut all business ties with Burma's military regime.

In August, two of the world's leading insurance companies Chubb and XL capitals announced a stop to all business deals with Burma's military government in response to the BUCK's campaign.

"The British government clearly wants them to pull out, we want them to pull out," said Chatterton adding that the Burmese regime could lose tens of millions of Dollars if the Lloyd's stop insuring oil and natural gas in the Southeast Asian nation.

BCUK, however, said Lloyd's refusal to reveal the contents of the FCO's letter indicates that it wants to hide its involvement in Burma.

While admitting that Lloyd's has received a letter from the FCO, Shield said they cannot reveal the contents as it is "Private".

BCUK warned that avoiding to act in accordance with the letter would be breaking the government's guidelines and damaging their own reputation.

"If they don't end their involvement in Burma soon they will be branded by Burma in the same way that Barclays was in Apartheid South Africa and Exxon with climate change," Chatterton said in a press statement released on Monday.

"We warmly welcome the government's firm stand against Lloyd's, they should continue their leading role by pushing for targeted EU sanctions banning the provision of insurance services to Burma," Chatterton added.

Myanmar detains political ally of Aung San Suu Kyi

[AP](#) - Thursday, October 2, 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar's military authorities have detained a prominent former journalist and political ally of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition party said Thursday.

Police took 64-year-old Ohn Kyaing from his home Wednesday evening, said Nyan Win, the spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

"The reason why he was detained was not known," Nyan Win said.

Ohn Kyaing was released from prison in 2005 after serving 15 years of a 17-year prison sentence for "writing and distributing seditious pamphlets" and threatening state security.

Ohn Kyaing joined the NLD after a long career in journalism and won a parliamentary seat in 1990 — elections that were overwhelmingly won by Suu Kyi's party but which the military junta refused to recognize.

Until then, he had worked at several newspapers and written articles under the pen name "Aung Wint."

Ohn Kyaing is a close friend and former colleague of Win Tin, another former journalist turned opposition politician, who was the longest-serving political prisoner in Myanmar until his release Sept. 23. Win Tin served 19 years behind bars.

Asked to comment on the detention of Ohn Kyaing, Win Tin said, it "is not unusual and something we have to expect. He is a close colleague, a good friend and a highly qualified man."

The Home Ministry, which is in charge of police, could not be reached for comment Thursday. Authorities seldom comment on arrests of this nature.

Myanmar has been under military rule for 46 years and is one of the world's poorest and most authoritarian nations. Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has been detained for 13 of the last 19 years.

Only half of Myanmar cyclone aid fund delivered

[AP](#) - Wednesday, October 1, 2008

YANGON, Myanmar: Only about 50 percent of funds needed by the United Nations to help Myanmar after the devastation of Cyclone Nargis have so far been contributed, the U.N. said Wednesday.

The U.N. sought a total of US\$482 million from member states and other organizations five months ago in the wake of the May 2-3 cyclone, but it has managed to collect only US\$240 million, the organization's Yangon office said in a statement.

Cyclone Nargis, the worst natural disaster in the country's modern history, killed more than 78,000 people and left another 56,000 missing, according to the government.

It affected 2.4 million people living in Yangon and the important rice-cultivating Irrawaddy delta — yet agricultural recovery has been the one of the least-funded sectors, said the statement.

The top U.N. representative in Myanmar, Bishow Parajuli, said funds were still needed to provide support as its aid efforts move into the rehabilitation phase after the immediate needs of the emergency.

"People and communities have been severely affected. It will take a long time until the needs are met," Parajuli was quoted saying.

The U.N. said more than 33,000 tons (metric tons) of food had reached over 733,000 people affected by the cyclone, and outbreaks of waterborne diseases and dengue fever in the cyclone-affected areas had been successfully prevented.

The U.N. statement was issued on behalf of the Tripartite Core Group, established at the end of May to coordinate international assistance. The group comprises the Myanmar government, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations.

Myanmar to boost tourism with seaside airport at cyclone scene

[AFP](#) – 1 October 2008

YANGON — Myanmar authorities are building a seaside airport in the southwest region laid waste by a cyclone five months ago, a local weekly paper reported Wednesday.

They hope to boost tourism at Ngwesaung beach, in the country's Irrawaddy delta near the Bay of Bengal, 7Day said.

"The hotel authorities in Ngwesaung beach said an airport with an 8,000-foot (2,400-metre) long runway is under construction now at the beach," the paper said.

Ngwesaung beach, opened in 2000, is 240 kilometres (150 miles) from the main city Yangon, in the middle of the area left devastated by Cyclone Nargis, which struck May 2-3 and left 138,000 people dead or missing.

The beach attracts foreign tourists looking for budget deals according to one tour operator.

"Spanish and Italian tourists are more interested in Ngwesaung beach as the hotel rates there are lower than at Ngapali beach," a tour company operation manager told AFP, referring to a beach in Rakhine state already accessible by air and speaking on condition of anonymity.

"But recently the road has been very bad since the Nargis cyclone and because of the rainy season," she said.

Ngwesaung beach has 20 hotels providing 800 guest rooms according to official statistics.

Construction of the airport began in the third week of September, the report said.

Aid and water dry up in Burma's cyclone zone

Villagers living along the Rangoon River are still coping with the fallout from Cyclone Nargis, with a lack of clean drinking water a growing problem

[The Times](#) - October 1, 2008

Kenneth Demby in Ahgnu, Burma

A gale blew through the village of Ahgnu — and the effect it had was devastating.

Not the physical damage, for the winds were no stronger than 40mph and even the feeblest of the palm and bamboo shelters remained intact. The chaos was in the minds of the villagers — 1,500 poor farmers and fishermen stricken by horror far out of proportion to the strength of the storm.

Men ran about, attempting to secure their homes with guy ropes attached to trees. Children screamed and huddled inside and mothers fled to the village monastery.

"We knelt down and prayed to be protected from the wind," said one woman in the riverside village east of the Rangoon River. "Everyone was so afraid. We prayed that this would not be Nargis all over again."

It is five months since Cyclone Nargis tore across the Irrawaddy delta and the city of Rangoon. On the face of it, the catastrophe has been brought under control. After early obstruction by Burma's military

Government, a large international aid effort has relieved the worst effects of the disaster and begun the job of rebuilding.

Food, medicines and shelter are flowing into the delta, with no secondary disaster from hunger or disease, as many had feared.

Outside Burma, the catastrophe is a fading memory; after a surge of donations in the early weeks, new funds for aid groups have dwindled to a trickle.

But the cyclone is still doing its damage — to livelihoods, education and health, as well as through the terror lingering in the minds of those who survived it. And the people of the Irrawaddy delta are no better placed to resist a future cyclone than they were five months ago.

“These new houses we have made now cannot stand another serious storm,” says a man named Hla Thaing, in Ahgnu. “It would be hell to face it all over again.”

Like much else in Burma, it comes down to a fundamental problem: the Government, in various incarnations, has tyrannised the country for 46 years. For three weeks after the cyclone struck on May 2, Senior General Than Shwe and his junta allowed only a small number of foreign aid workers to travel into the devastated areas.

A natural disaster became an international political confrontation as longstanding disgust at the oppressiveness of the regime fused with fresh anger at its neglect of cyclone victims.

Then, on May 25, the visiting UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, secured a promise from General Than Shwe that foreign aid workers would be allowed into the delta. The governments of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) brokered a comprehensive aid plan with the UN and the generals, and since then the humanitarian effort has gone relatively smoothly.

Thousands of foreign aid workers, representing scores of UN and independent organisations, have gone into the delta. Although permission must be sought a few days in advance, it is rarely declined.

In terms of the number of contacts it has with the Burmese Government, to make decisions on everything from rice imports and medical supplies to the distribution of ducks to stricken villages, the international community has never had such a close relationship with the suspicious and isolated regime.

There have been cases of malnutrition among children and of cholera, typhoid and malaria, but not significantly more than one would expect in Burma in a normal year.

An agricultural disaster appears to have been averted. Despite the inundation of salt water and the deaths of many of the water buffalo used for ploughing, 97 per cent of fields affected by the cyclone have been planted, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

They will probably yield less grain than usual, partly because of a shortage of fertilisers, but the shortfall will be made up in other parts of the country which produce a surplus of rice.

Either because of the action of the international community, or because the fears were exaggerated in the first place, there has been no second wave of deaths - which is not to say that the cyclone operation can yet be judged a success. One potentially deadly problem lies ahead: a lack of drinking water during Burma's dry season.

In the wet months water is so abundant that all that is necessary is to put out jars and watch them fill. The rainy season peters out in the middle of October, however, forcing villages to turn for fresh water to the beautiful lotus-festooned ponds which they all have.

But the cyclone inundated them with sea water and, though they have been drained repeatedly, many remain salty and undrinkable. It may take a year or two to flush them out; it may be that the cyclone has permanently altered the water table. Either way, many communities could run out of drinking water by the end of the year.

“If the problem really is widespread and if nothing is done to fix it, then people will die of thirst,” Larry James, a water expert contracted to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, said.

Money is drying up almost as fast as water. The UN's first emergency appeal was supported generously, but a second call for \$481 million (£270m) has been only half met — meaning that the agencies will be able to carry out emergency relief but not the second wave of reconstruction to set communities on their own feet.

“People have roofs over their heads, they can put food on the table and there's somewhere for their kids to go to school,” says Andrew Kirkwood, of the British charity Save the Children.

“But a huge number of livelihood assets were lost — fishing boats, nets, livestock. The irony is that if you don't replace those as well, you end up with people who, in the long run, are going to be more dependent on more, expensive aid.”

Lurking in the background is the deepest fear of all — another cyclone, as strong, or stronger. Nargis was unprecedented in Burmese history, but unpredictable weather patterns make it impossible to rule out a repeat, and the people of the delta are as unprepared now as they were in May.

“The old people here have lived through a lot,” said one Burmese aid worker. “They experienced the fighting between the Japanese and the British, and they survived. But they are afraid now; more afraid of the cyclone than of war.”

Burma's Censors Suspend Two Publications

[Irrawaddy](#) - Wednesday, October 1, 2008

By Lawi Weng and Moe Myint Yan - Two weekly publications have been suspended by Burma's notorious censorship board, after being accused of violating rules and regulations, according to local journalists.

True News was ordered to suspend publication for two months after a large photograph depicting a Burmese child working on a construction site in Thailand appeared on the front page of its Tuesday issue.

The second journal, The Action Times, was ordered to suspend publication for one month after defying a censorship board instruction to drop a brief report on dissident journalist Win Tin, who was released last week after 19 years imprisonment.

“The Press Scrutiny and Registration Board summoned the editors of True News and The Action Times [on Tuesday] and ordered them to stop publishing their journals for two months and one month respectively,” said a Rangoon-based journalist with connections to staff at the two publications.

The editor of The Action Times declined to comment on the ban on his publication when approached by The Irrawaddy. The journal was ordered to drop a brief report on the release of Win Tin and a profile of the journalist—formerly editor of the influential newspaper Hanthawaddy and vice-chairman of the Writers' Union, who served a total of 19 years in prison for his part in the 1988 pro-democracy uprising.

“I think this is why The Action Times has been banned for a month,” a Rangoon journalist told The Irrawaddy on Wednesday.

A freelance journalist in Rangoon who requested anonymity told The Irrawaddy that the censorship board's order suspending the publication of True News for two months was related to the sensitive photograph published on its front page.

The caption under the photograph read: “A Burmese child working on a construction site in Phuket, Thailand.”

The censorship board reportedly accused the editors of failing to submit clear draft layouts to its office for inspection.

According to the board's regulations, every journal in Burma must submit a draft of its final layout with clear photographs, captions and pullouts.

However, another source, who claimed to have spoken to a reporter at True News, said the censorship board had passed the photo and its caption, so the journal published it.

According to a source within the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division, certain authorities were annoyed by the photo and the censorship board's failure to spot it.

The source said the head of the censorship board, Maj Tint Swe, was reportedly admonished by Minister of Information Kyaw Hsan over the incident.

Myanmar discovers new large coal mine in Shan state

Xinhua - 2008-10-01 11:18:51

YANGON, Oct. 1 -- Myanmar has discovered a new large coal mine in northern part of the country's Shan state and mining of the mineral will start with a local private company soon, the local weekly 7-Day News reported Wednesday.

The newly-found coal mine in Mongma area has the highest deposit of quality coal and it is estimated to yield thousands of tons of the mineral annually to help meet a domestic demand for at least 30 years, the report said.

The exploitation of the coal mine by the AAA Company will begin at the end of this year, it added.

There are about 10 coal mines in the northeastern state in operation, according to the report.

Statistics showed that with a total of 82 coal mining blocks in the whole country, Myanmar produced 282,655 tons of coal in the fiscal year 2007-08 which ended in March, up 19.5 percent from 2006-07.

Escapee Describes Torture in Burma: The only leader of Burma's 2007 uprising known to have escaped custody says monks have been singled out for rough treatment.

[*Radio Free Asia*](#) - 2008-10-01

NEW DELHI—The only leader of Burma's 2007 Saffron Revolution to escape from a junta prison camp has described torture and backbreaking hard labor in custody.

Ashin Panna Siri spoke after arriving safely in New Delhi following his breakout from the Lin Dan prison camp in Burma's Chin state on Sept. 15. He was a close associate of U Gambira, leader of the All-Burmese Monks Alliance, which spearheaded last year's uprising against the military junta that has ruled Burma since 1988.

"I was badly tortured during interrogation [by] agents from military security affairs [formerly military intelligence], and special branch police and conventional police," Ashin Panna Siri said in an interview.

"I was forced to do squatting and stand on one foot while answering questions. When I couldn't answer or the answer was unsatisfactory, I was punched in the head, face, and ribs. My toes were stepped on by boots," he said.

"The military security agent was worst. He kicked my face with boots and also kicked my chest. He said he wouldn't care if he was dismissed for using violent methods. He also put his pistol on table and threatened me."

On Sept. 15, Ashin Panna Siri said, he scaled two barbed-wire fences to flee the camp—one of them 10 feet high and one 15 feet high. He declined to disclose any details of his flight to India.

"I climbed over both fences. My hands and arms were torn and lacerated by the barbed wire. But I didn't care," he said

Hard labor

Even monks handed only brief sentences for their roles in the 2007 uprising were sent to hard labor camps, a punishment usually reserved for those handed longer terms, he said.

"Conditions in these camps are far worse than in proper prisons. The food is horrible. Rice mixed with stones and sometimes with rat feces. There was almost no proper medical care and inmates had to do very hard labor," he said.

"Our feet were chained. We had to work from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., and then from 1 p.m. to 4 or 5 p.m. We had only Sundays off. It was very hard labor. We had to bring timber logs and carry them on our shoulders. We had to dig ditches, pound gravel, and mend roads," Ashin Panna Siri said.

While he was initially detained from Oct. 18-24 in police station #1 in Monywa, he said, "High-level military officials—I believe they were the divisional commander and deputy commander—visited quite often and closely supervised my questioning to get information from me. They asked my interrogators in front of me, 'What is the situation now? What information did we get? Get it from him by any means!'"

Ashin Panna Siri was convicted Jan. 18, 2008 of possessing foreign currency, which he acknowledges having at the time of his arrest. "The reason they didn't charge me with political acts is that they want to deny that there are any political prisoners in Burma," he said.

Ashin Panna Siri hid with U Gambira after the crackdown, in which dozens were killed and thousands arrested. Arrested on Oct. 18, 2007, he spent seven months in Kalay prison before he was convicted and sent to hard labor.

Original reporting and translation by Ko Ko Aung and Nay Lin for RFA's Burmese service. Service director: Nancy Shwe. Executive producer: Susan Lavery. Written and produced in English by Sarah Jackson-Han.

Religious freedom hanging in the balance in Burma

[Mizzima News](#) - Wednesday, 01 October 2008 07:15

The United States State Department has accused Burma's governing junta of being guilty of systematic religious persecution against members of the dominant Buddhist community as well religious minorities throughout the country.

In Friday's release of its 10th Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice again identified Burma as one of eight "Countries of Particular Concern." Burma has been classified as such in each of the ten years of publication.

With specific reference to the monk-led protests of 2007, the report calls out the generals on their attempt to "systematically restrict efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom."

Citing the numerous raids of monasteries in the weeks and months since the Saffron Revolution, in addition to the physical abuse suffered by several members of the clergy at the hands of government security forces, the State Department chastises the junta for severely curtailing religious freedom of expression and association.

"Members of the Sangha were not allowed to preach sermons pertaining to politics. Religious lectures could not contain any words, phrases, or stories reflecting political views," according to the study's findings.

Meanwhile, adherence to a form of Buddhism in accordance with the interests of the military government continues to be a goal of the regime as well as a means of personal advancement for those deemed to be dutifully toeing the line.

Though crediting the government with apparently no longer subscribing to a policy of forced conversion, the reports authors spare no corner in their disclosure of the numerous means through which the regime seeks the conversion of non-Buddhists to Buddhism.

Potential benefits to be enjoyed by obliging Buddhists within Burma's tightly controlled social network are said to include favoritism for promotion within government and military ranks as well as a loosening of restrictions on proselytizing religious doctrine when compared to the working environments of adherents to other systems of belief such as Christianity and Islam.

The report does acknowledge that government promotion of Buddhism to the detriment of minority religions is well-entrenched in the annals of modern Burmese history, with attempts under the democratically elected government of Prime Minister U Nu an expanding component of the fabric of Burmese politics in the latter 1950s and early 1960s.

However, in a relatively new development, the study finds that there is a growing prejudice on the part of the state against citizens of South Asian origin, of which followers of Islam comprise a significant percentage of the population.

Meanwhile, "Christian groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to buy land or build new churches in most regions," according to the findings.

Burma's Rohingya Muslims are singled out for their persistent targeting by the regime, a population that is still not even eligible to obtain National Registration Cards indicating they are in fact a component of Burmese society.

Additionally, "Since 1988 the Government permits only three marriages per year per village in the primarily Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Rakhine State," discloses the study, "and each marriage requires the approval of the Regional Military Commander."

In Washington D.C., Rice told reporters, "The United States will continue to actively promote religious freedom as essential to human dignity, a robust civil society, and democratic development."

"But we are concerned by efforts to promote a so-called defamation of religions concept, which has been the focus of numerous resolutions passed at the United Nations," continued the Secretary of State. "Instead of protecting religious practice and promoting tolerance, this concept seeks to limit freedom of speech and that could undermine the standards of international religious freedom."

China, India, Indonesia, Russia and Vietnam are also singled out in the report as countries of "significant interest" to the United States in the realm of religious persecution.

Each of these five countries is a member of United Nations Secretary Ban Ki-moon's 'Group of Friends' regarding U.N. initiatives targeting the crisis prone Southeast Asian country.

Burma: two weeklies suspended, jailed blogger appears in court again

[Reporters Without Borders](#) - 01.10.08

Reporters Without Borders condemns yesterday's decision by military government censors to suspend two privately-owned weeklies. True News was ordered to stop publishing for two months for printing a photo of Burmese children working on a building site in Thailand. Action Times was told to stop publishing for a month, apparently because of its coverage of the release of 9,000 prisoners.

A Rangoon-based journalist told The Irrawaddy (www.irrawaddy.org), an exile publication based in neighbouring Thailand, that the suspension orders were issued when the editors of the two publications were summoned yesterday by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board (the censorship office). Under a 1962 law, printers and publishers are required to register with the censorship office and submit two copies of every issue for vetting prior to publication.

Meanwhile, the state-owned media still have not informed the public about the contamination risks of Chinese milk powder, which is widely consumed in Burma because of its low price. Only Burma's privately-owned press has covered China's baby formula scandal, the political crisis in Thailand or the release of journalist U Win Tin (although they have not been allowed to publish any photo of him).

Imprisoned blogger Nay Phone Latt appeared in court again yesterday on charges under article 5 (j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act, article 505 (b) of the criminal code (concerning defamation of the state) and article 33 (a) of the Electronic Act. He has been in solitary confinement since his first court appearance in June.

Reporters Without Borders regards his continuing detention as arbitrary and reiterates its call for his release.

Naypyidaw auctions seized vehicles in southern Burma

[Independent Mon News Agency](#) - Tue 30 Sep 2008

The Burmese military establishment in Mon State has been auctioning vehicles seized from residents in southern Burma on the orders of Naypyidaw.

The vehicles are kept in Moulmein Stadium and the Southeast Command has been urging ethnic cease-fire groups and business establishments to buy it.

According to New Mon State Party (NMSP) sources, the order to auction vehicles came from Naypyidaw, "But I am not sure when the order came."

Sources in NMSP, which reached a cease-fire with the Burmese government in 1995, said Naypyidaw drew up the prices depending on the make of the vehicles.

The organization which pays the auction price will get the vehicles from the Southeast Command.

The auction began early this month, following which local car prices fell.

According to car traders, prices of old Toyota and Hilux cars dropped from 17 million Kyat (13,386 US\$) to 12 million Kyat (9,449 US\$).

"We are facing losses for over a month. Many stopped buying these cars, even though the cars have license," a car dealer told IMNA.

More than a thousand illegal vehicles which were seized in 2003-2004 have been stored at the Southeast Command base.

Most vehicles were seized from local residents and the cease-fire group. In 2003 the Burmese regime made a new law where those who owned illegal cars and things imported from neighbouring countries would face three years in prison and started seizing the cars.

The NMSP, Karen Peace Front (KPF) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) had their vehicles seized. The junta only gave back the seized cars to DKBA.

NMSP lost dozens of cars in 2003 and does not dare to buy it back afraid that regime's law is not consistent.

Some businessmen from Moulmein industrial zone are interested and most of them are close to military officers.

The Southeast Command sold vehicles at low prices in 2004 after they seized it. The colours of the seized vehicles were changed.

US group studies potential war crimes by Myanmar military

[AFP](#) – 1 October 2008

WASHINGTON — An independent US group is to carry out unprecedented studies to determine whether Myanmar's military rulers, accused of rampant human rights abuses, have committed international crimes.

The Center for Constitutional Democracy at Indiana University's school of law said it would launch the research based on anecdotal evidence of "severe mistreatment" of marginalized ethnic groups by the junta.

"At this stage of the project, I can't honestly say that there are international crimes," the center's executive director, David Williams, told AFP by telephone.

"What I can say is there may be, and part of our goal would be to gather the evidence and try to come out with some objective conclusions about whether there are or not," he said.

The center's goal, he said, was to make focused research "in areas where perhaps it is most likely that international crimes were committed."

Only the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) can determine whether international crimes, such as war crimes and crimes against humanity, have been committed by any individual or group.

So far, Williams said, there has been no institutional focus on possible international crimes committed by Myanmar's junta, which imposed a bloody crackdown of pro-democracy protests in September earning global condemnation.

The crackdown -- according to United Nations figures -- left 31 people dead and 74 others missing, and resulted in thousands of arrests.

The military rulers had also come under international fire and were called "heartless" by some humanitarian groups for initially not allowing foreign aid when a cyclone left 138,000 people dead or missing in May.

Myanmar also houses more than 2,100 political prisoners, including democracy icon and Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent more than 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest.

Williams said that although the ICC had not initiated any study on the military junta's record so far, "ours might be a good place for them to get started.

"It might help the various investigators know where to go and what allegations to examine and so forth," he said.

When asked whether in his personal opinion some of the junta's actions could be deemed as international crimes, Williams said: "What I might be able to say is that it looks to me, in my professional opinion, like there is a good chance that it is.

"And it makes sense therefore to bring a prosecution because there is enough evidence that a court should be able to see it."

The university group's staff had been for the last six years helping ethnic groups inside Myanmar -- at their request -- draw up constitutional reforms in their struggle to win greater freedom and rights.

Law professor Williams had smuggled himself into Myanmar on various occasions and worked on constitutional reforms with the Karen ethnic group, fighting the government since 1947 in the world's longest running civil war.

"I am hearing endless stories about how the military government is murdering villagers, it's blowing up rice paddies so that they dry out, it's setting fires to villages, it's laying mines in those villages so that when the people come back some of them get blown up," he said.

"The result is that they have to move often to hills and find a new place to build a village and start growing rice. That means in a relatively short period of time there is famine because old rice paddies have to be abandoned."

Williams said while he did not witness the Myanmar military units attacking the Karen guerilla resistance units, he saw "evidence of the military going after the civilian population.

"That's just the tip of the iceberg in itself and that doesn't constitute conclusive evidence of an international crime but it makes you think," he said.

Burmese Exile Media Web Site Again Under Attack

[Irrawaddy](#) - Wednesday, October 1, 2008

By SAW YAN NAING - The Web site of the *Mizzima* Burmese dissident news organization in exile has again come under attack by pro-regime hackers.

Sein Win, editor of the *Mizzima* news agency, said the site, www.mizzima.com, had been briefly knocked out on Wednesday morning by hackers calling themselves "Independence Hackers from Burma." The attack lasted about 10 hours.

Visitors to the site found a crude, ungrammatical message reading: "Dear MIZZIMA Readers...Listen Please, Why Hack This Website?... Because we are Independence Hackers from Burma. We Born for Hack Those F**king Media Website, Which Are Ever Talk about only Worse News for Our Country. We

are very sorry for Webadmin, You Need to More Secure Your Website. Now We Warn to All Media Webadmins That is "Prepare to More Secure Your Work."

Mizzima and three other Burmese opposition Web sites—*The Irrawaddy*, the *Democratic Voice of Burma* and *Khitpyaing*—came under cyber attack late last month.

Mizzima was hacked while the three other sites were bombarded by a so-called "distributed denial-of-service", or DDoS, which overloads Web sites with an unmanageable amount of traffic.

The attacks coincided with the first anniversary of the regime's brutal suppression of monk-led demonstrations in September 2007.

Exiled media groups, bloggers, reporters inside Burma and citizen journalists played major roles in reporting on the September 2007 uprising.

As Burmese commemorated the September 2007 uprising, the authorities intensified their watch over Internet cafes in Rangoon. In some Internet cafes, users have to show their ID, while informers observe students playing video games. Buddhist monks complain that they are treated like criminals if they are seen using the Internet.

Myanmar on the cyber-offensive

[Asia Times](#) – 1 October 2008

By Brian McCartan - MAE SOT, Thailand - The distributed denial of service attacks, or DDoS, that hit and disabled several exile media websites between September 17 to 19, are widely held to be the latest attempt by Myanmar's military regime to silence its legion of critics.

The cyber-attacks, which flood a website with information requests which block regular traffic and eventually overload and crash it, coincided with the run-up to last year's "Saffron" revolution, in which soldiers opened fire and killed Buddhist monks and anti-government demonstrators. But the junta's cyber-warfare specialists appear to have wider designs than just censoring an uncomfortable anniversary and they are receiving plenty of foreign assistance in upgrading their political dissent-quashing capabilities.

The Defense Services Computer Directorate (DSCD) was set up by the War Office in around 1990, originally with the aim of modernizing the military's communications and administration systems. By the mid-1990s, however, the center had become much more focused on Information Warfare operations, according to a signals intelligence expert who spoke with Asia Times Online.

The center became responsible for monitoring telephone calls, faxes, e-mails and other forms of electronic data exchange. Another computer center was later set up at the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI), Myanmar's main military intelligence service. The DSCD is aimed more at military communications, while the intelligence service's computer center is more politically focused, including monitoring opposition groups both within and outside Myanmar.

The service was disbanded in 2004 after the arrest of former prime minister and intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt. It was later reformed as the Military Affairs Security (MAS), which has also presumably taken over cyber-warfare functions, and its capabilities have reportedly substantially improved in recent years.

Singapore has been the military's main partner in bolstering those capabilities. The DSCD was originally set up with computers from Singapore and the city-state has been heavily involved in the cyber-units technological evolution, including upgrades to the regime's computerized information systems hardware and training, says the signals intelligence expert. The intelligence service's center was also set up with Singapore-provided assistance.

Several opposition media sources, including *The Irrawaddy* magazine and *Democratic Voice of Burma* satellite television station, have said they received information that the most recent attacks on their Websites may have been conducted by Myanmar military officers trained or undergoing training in Russia and China. A longtime analyst of Myanmar's signals intelligence capabilities noted that many of the officers who have undergone training in Russia and China have taken courses in computing and information technology.

While China has been heavily involved in improvements to the Myanmar military's radio communications and, together with Singapore, connecting major military commands with fiber-optic cable, it apparently has been less involved in developing the regime's cyber-warfare capabilities, experts say.

The opposition movement has become noted for its extensive usage of the Internet to send and receive information, reports and news the regime has tried to suppress. As activists and underground journalists have become more tech-savvy, the intelligence service has become more determined to counter the outflow of information. Much of this has taken the form of harassment and more recently DDoS attacks.

Long-running media list server, BurmaNet News, has been a target of Myanmar's junta, which is known to have posted misleading and often inaccurate information to discredit the pro-democracy movement. In 2000, a wave of e-mail messages were received by activists with attachments containing a virus that many suspected came from the regime.

Exile-run political groups, human-rights groups and non-governmental organizations have all repeatedly accused the regime of launching viruses, and Trojan horses, defacing websites, sending waves of spam e-mail and even purchasing domain names with political significance. Although it is difficult to prove who exactly is behind the waves of cyber-harassment, the sheer volume of the attacks points to the regime's trained cyber-specialists, experts say.

Last year, the day after the regime's violent crackdown on street protesters, the Thailand-based Burmese media organization The Irrawaddy was hit by a virus that also infected visitors to their site. The timing of the attack raised suspicions of the junta's involvement.

In July 2008, the websites of the exile-run, Oslo-based Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and New Delhi-based Mizzima News were hit by DDoS attacks that shut down their websites for several days. The attacks followed both news organizations' extensive reporting on the junta's inept and some say corrupt response to the Cyclone Nargis disaster.

On September 17, another wave of DDoS attacks was launched, this time against The Irrawaddy, DVB and the Bangkok-based New Era Journal. Two community forums, Mystery Zillion and Planet Myanmar, were disabled and shut down by similar attacks in August. Although not political in nature, both websites provided information and instruction on how to circumvent the regime's tough Internet controls and firewalls, which include blocks on internationally hosted e-mail services gmail and Yahoo!.

Strategic attacks

Analysts say the cyber-attacks have notably ramped up during the anniversaries of the August 1988 pro-democracy uprising and military repression, and the September 2007 crackdown. Servers involved in the most recent attacks have apparently been situated in Russia and China - however, experts say this may have been done by hackers trying to cover their tracks.

According to communications security expert and Australian National University Professor Desmond Ball, DDoS attacks are relatively simple and can be engineered without the aid of powerful computers or an advanced computer science degree. Similar attacks, he says, have been carried out against Taiwan and Japan for years by young nationalistic Chinese hackers.

DDoS attacks, redirection and defacing of websites are all overt forms of cyber-harassment, but the real essence of cyber-warfare, says Ball, lies in the ability to penetrate a computer or a network, cover your tracks to avoid detection on the way in and out and steal information or disrupt systems without the target knowing that they have been hacked.

The military regime's capabilities in this regard may be where the real danger lies, he says. So far there is little known about the ability of Myanmar's government cyber-warriors to carry out these attacks, partly because the nature of these kinds of attacks is to remain undetected.

Internet security among computer users worldwide is notoriously lax and this includes Burmese exile political and media organizations. Without firewalls and anti-virus programs configured properly and IT specialists monitoring computer systems - an expensive proposition for most exile groups - they are at a distinct disadvantage against the junta.

Domestically, the regime has spent considerable effort to block the flow of information into the country through the use of filtering software that block certain media, human rights and political sites, as well as

gambling, pornography and other sites deemed socially unacceptable. Through the use of proxy servers and encrypted webmail services, many of Myanmar's citizens have been able to circumvent some of these controls.

Their tech savvy was shown to the world in September 2007, when graphic images and video of the military's brutal crackdown on protesters were broadcast from an instant army of citizen reporters, who sent their files to outside news organizations over the Internet. In Myanmar's heavily controlled communications environment, there are only a handful of Internet service providers (ISPs), all of them either state-owned or with strong government ties, and thus easy for the regime to disconnect.

Exile groups and much of the media pointed to the three-day period between the beginning of the crackdown in late September 2007 and the shutdown of the Internet as evidence of the junta's lack of technical expertise. Ball, however, contends that the opposite is true.

The generals were willing to endure some international criticism in order to monitor who was communicating with whom before shutting the system down altogether. This information would likely have fueled their post-demonstration manhunts, where thousands were put behind bars, he says.

Myanmar's original ISP is the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, which was later joined by Bagan Cybertech, a private communications company established by the son of former intelligence chief Khin Nyunt. Following his arrest, the company was partially taken over by the government and renamed BaganNet/Myanmar Teleport.

A third ISP was reportedly set up by the government-supported mass organization the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in 2007 and is known as Information Technology Central Services. In July 2008, a fourth ISP was launched called Hanthawaddy National Gateway.

Established with technical assistance from China's Alcatel Shanghai Bell, the service is currently only available to military officers, but is expected to eventually expand throughout the country. Alcatel Shanghai Bell is represented locally by Myanmar tycoon Tay Za, a close associate to the country's leader Senior General Than Shwe and other senior officers.

Speculation as to the extent of the regime's cyber-warfare capabilities comes during a fast expansion of Internet access across the country. In addition to two new ISP providers, the generals are pushing local and foreign investment in its Yadanabon Cyber City project, located east of Mandalay.

Over one-fifth of the 4,500 hectare city is slated for computer hardware and software factories and is expected to have modern Internet services available through ADSL, CATV, Triple Play and Wi Max. In July, 12 local and foreign companies, including CBOSS of Russia, agreed to invest US\$22 million in the development of the city.

Although ostensibly a civilian initiative, much of the technology to be developed, built and used there would have dual use capabilities, experts say.

Brian McCartan is a Chiang Mai-based freelance journalist. He may be reached at brianpm@comcast.net.

Junta issues warning on tainted milk

[Mizzima News](#) - Tuesday, 30 September 2008 17:44

New Delhi - For the first time Burma's state-run newspaper has issued a warning to avoid the use of potentially tainted milk as it can cause severe health damage, particularly to children.

A report in the Burmese language newspaper Myanmar Ahlin, an official government mouth-piece, on Tuesday said with Chinese milk and milk products found to contain the chemical melamine, people should avoid using uncertified milk and milk products.

The report came weeks after the Chinese government announced finding the chemical melamine in milk products produced by several Chinese dairy firms. China had also announced that two of the companies identified as having marketed tainted milk had been exporting their milk and milk products to at least five countries, including Burma.

The warning in the government-newspaper, however, did not identify any particular brand of milk powder that people should avoid, instead generally articulating that tainted milk could cause kidney complication, even resulting in the development of kidney stones.

Yet critics have said that they believe Chinese milk powder has made its way to markets in Burma and believe many Burmese children, not knowing any better, are consuming the potentially hazardous products.

A shopkeeper in Burma's second largest city, Mandalay, said they are still selling milk imported from China and have so far received no notice or announcement by the authorities to stop such sales.

"We are continuing to sell Chinese milk powder here, and so far there is no notice from the authorities to stop sales," she said, adding that they are continuing to receive Chinese goods.

Mandalay is the largest commercial hub in upper Burma and receives almost all border imports from China, be they of the legal or illegal variety.

An Associated Press report on Monday, citing a local Rangoon newspaper, said the Burmese Ministry of Commerce has barred entry of all dairy products from China since last Tuesday.

However an official at the Ministry of Commerce on Friday told Mizzima, "We have not ordered any ban but are conducting stricter vigilance on all goods, and particularly on milk and milk products."

Officials at the ministry on Tuesday were not immediately available to comment.

A businessman in Laiza, a Sino-Burmese border town and one of the major trading points from which Chinese goods enter Burma, said so far there are no orders to ban milk products from China.

"Though we heard there would be a ban on milk powders from China, the goods are still being imported and there is no strict order that bans the import [of milk products]," he said.

Chinese milk powders are still being imported in large quantity and the flow of Chinese goods is normal, he went on to elaborate.

"I don't think the government can stop the flow of Chinese milk powder this way even if it wanted. If the government really wanted to prevent [the import of Chinese milk powder], then they must strictly ban the import of the commodity and announce it to the public in order to make them understand," he said.

He added that most people on the border are not even aware of the danger that tainted milk poses, and children are still seen taking Chinese milk powder.

"Only a few people who listen to the radio are aware of the situation. But for most people, since Chinese milk is cheap, they are continuing to buy and consume," he added

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese analyst based in Ruili on the Sino-Burmese border, another trading point, said there has been no order to ban Chinese milk and milk products.

"Just about two days ago I saw at least 15 lorries loaded with Chinese goods, including milk powder, heading toward Mandalay," Aung Kyaw Zaw said.

He added that with many Chinese dairy companies unable to export their products to other countries, companies are likely to target Burma as a potential market, as the Burmese authorities have so far not enforced a strict ban.

"But even if the government does officially ban [Chinese milk], it would still be impossible to stop the illegal import," he continued.

Meanwhile, the Burmese Food and Drug Administration, under the Ministry of Health, said it is testing milk products and those products found safe will be given a 'melamine-free' stamp, according to the Associated Press report.

But shop owners in Mandalay's Zegyo market, the largest Chinese goods selling market in the city, said so far there are no authorities conducting tests on Chinese milk and milk products that are for sale.

"We are still selling Chinese milk powders, and we have not received any order to stop," the shop owner explained.

Meanwhile, the milk scandal in China has killed at least 4 children and caused at least 54,000 children to fall ill. But Aung Kyaw Zaw, citing Chinese journalists and friends, said at least 60 children have died from consuming tainted milk powder.

The Chinese government, for its part, closed down 22 dairy companies whose products were found to contain the chemical melamine.

Reporting by The The & Tun Tun, writing by Mungpi.

Myanmar FM urges lifting 'counter-productive' sanctions

[AFP](#) – 30 September 2008

UNITED NATIONS — Myanmar's foreign minister Foreign Minister Nyan Win on Monday called for the lifting of what he called "unwarranted" and "counter-productive" Western sanctions against his country.

"These sanctions are unwarranted," he told the UN General Assembly, referring to "unilateral" sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States.

The sanctions were imposed on Myanmar's military regime for its refusal to release political prisoners, including democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, end repression of minority groups and start genuine national reconciliation.

"They are not only unfair but immoral. They are counter-productive and deprive the countries of their right to development," Nyan Win said.

He also pointed out that Myanmar has "abundant land and natural resources to be able to make a meaningful contribution to energy and food security of our country and beyond."

"In order for us to fulfill our potential we need unfettered access to markets. We need modern technology. We need investment," the Myanmar minister added. "The sooner the unjust sanctions are revoked and the barriers removed, the sooner will the country be in a position to become the rice bowl of the region and a reliable source of energy."

Last July, US President George W. Bush renewed a ban on imports from Myanmar and also signed a new law that aims to keep Myanmar's gems from entering US markets via third-party countries.

In parallel, the US Treasury Department slapped financial sanctions on 10 companies owned or controlled by the Myanmar government or government officials, including companies involved in the gem trade.

The European Union also tightened its own sanctions against Myanmar in May, including an embargo on the import of timber, gems and metals from Myanmar.

The 27-nation bloc also extended the list of Myanmar leaders and their relatives subject to a travel ban and assets freeze.

UN appeal for Myanmar's cyclone victims 50 per cent unfunded

[DPA/Monsters and Critics.com](#) - Sep 30, 2008, 9:17 GMT

Yangon - The United Nations' flash appeal for the survivors of Cyclone Nargis remains 50 per cent unfunded, five months after the disaster, the group managing the relief effort disclosed Tuesday.

'Total contribution now stands at 240 million dollars out of the 482 million required. Agriculture and early recovery continue to be the least-funded sectors,' a statement issued by the Tripartite Core Group said.

The group, which has handled relief efforts for Cyclone Nargis victims since June, comprises representatives from the Myanmar government, UN agencies and the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

The tripartite mechanism was established to speed up an international relief effort for the victims of Cyclone Nargis which smashed into Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta region on May 2-3, leaving 140,000 people dead or missing and another 2.4 million in desperate need of food, water, medicines and shelter.

The effort initially ran into logistical bottlenecks, caused primarily by Myanmar's ruling junta's reluctance to grant travel visas to international aid workers to enter the reclusive country and other restrictive measures that slowed the flow of aid.

The aid flow increased significantly after the establishment of the tripartite group, but the international community has been slow to respond to the UN's appeal for aid.

Over the past five months more than 33,000 metric tons of food have reached over 733,000 people affected by the cyclone, the statement said.

Relief workers have also prevented outbreaks of diseases in the cyclone affected areas, but much still needs to be done.

'People and communities have been severely affected. It will take a long time until the needs are met,' said UN resident coordinator Bishow Parajuli, who called on the international community not to forget the cyclone survivors.

The UN expressed concerns of possible water scarcity in the coming dry season, due to increased salinity of pond water after the cyclone and below-average rainfall.

The statement also noted the need for durable and sustainable shelter that could withstand the weather conditions in the affected areas.

Slow recovery for Burma's cyclone victims: Aid trickles in, but locals struggle to find food before winter's harvest.

By Anand Gopal | Correspondent of [The Christian Science Monitor](#)

from the October 1, 2008 edition

Mya Sein Ken, Burma - The locals say things will never be the same in Mya Sein Ken, deep in the heart of the cyclone-savaged delta in southern Burma (Myanmar). Almost 300 people vanished when cyclone Nargis struck here in May. The torrent obliterated the rice crop, and locals worry they won't have enough food to survive the fall. The storm swallowed scores of houses, leaving hundreds homeless.

"I awake every day remembering what happened," says one villager from his temporary home, donated by aid agencies. "We are living on handouts, and I don't know when we will stand on our own again."

Everywhere across the delta, Burmese are still struggling to piece together their lives. While a modest but steady flow of aid has kept locals afloat, villagers warn that their troubles are far from over.

"Nargis destroyed our food reserves," says the villager. "We need to figure out a way to survive until December's harvest."

A recent joint assessment by the United Nations and southeast Asian governments found that more than 40 percent of households in the affected areas have less than one day's worth of food on reserve.

Locals also say that the storm destroyed more than a third of the infrastructure for fishing, a major source of income and food for residents here.

Seawater flooding has rendered 40 percent of the rice paddies in the area unusable, according to villagers. "It's too early to tell to what extent December's harvest will be affected," says an official with a prominent international nongovernmental organization based in Rangoon, who asked not to be identified.

But analysts with the World Food Program, a United Nations agency, say more than 900,000 people will need food assistance in the coming months and nearly 300,000 people will require relief until April of next year.

Infrastructure demolished

Food supplies aren't the only casualty cyclone Nargis left in its wake when it tore through Burma's delta, a labyrinth of natural canals and rice paddies that functions as the country's rice bowl. The cyclone killed an estimated 135,000 and ravaged the area's landscape and infrastructure.

The banks of the delta's many rivers are still littered with the seaweed-encrusted remains of fishing boats. Bamboo from demolished houses are scattered like matchsticks along the shore, and every few miles a mangled wharf juts out into the water. Many of the smaller roads are pocked with craters, making them impassable and forcing locals to rely entirely on waterborne transport.

The few palm trees still standing along the denuded coastlines bow to the north, a reminder of the fury that came from the southern sea in May.

But the people here don't need many reminders. "I still can't sleep through the night," says Khim Myat Thu, a young schoolgirl. When the winds came, Khim scaled the nearest coconut tree while her parents raced to find a boat. She watched from the treetop as the waters carried away her mother and then her father.

In a village at the nearby Bogely Township, Saw La Tey and his family fled their house to a nearby high point, just as a wall of water came speeding toward them. Everyone managed to escape except his enfeebled grandmother.

Two hundred of the village's 308 residents went missing that night. The survivors squeezed into the only three buildings in the village that the storm had left untouched and stayed there for almost a month until building supplies arrived.

A steady trickle of aid

Aid to these areas came excruciatingly slowly at first, hampered by the government's restrictions on NGOs' relief work and apparently minimal assistance. "The government has not even visited once since the storm," an elder of the village of Mya Sein Ken says.

In the government's place, a network of more than 30 informal Burmese aid groups and dozens of international NGOs have been quietly delivering aid, often by boat, to many of the affected villages. Despite early fears that it would choke the aid flow completely, the junta has for the most part permitted Burmese organizations and local citizen groups to deliver these relief supplies.

Larger foreign organizations, however, are still victims of government suspicion and red tape, say aid agency representatives. Authorities restrict most foreigners, including journalists, from visiting the delta area.

A select few foreign NGO workers may visit the region after applying for a permit, but are still subject to the whims of the government.

Authorities also regulate the amount and type of aid that can be delivered. "Any monetary donations have to go through the government. Those who handle cash often have to pay under the table," says Burmese aid worker Hein Thein. "Donations made 'in kind' are the most effective form of aid because the government won't steal it." This includes educational supplies, basic foodstuffs, and construction materials.

This steady trickle of aid is allowing locals to resurrect their shattered villages. Across the delta, motley structures of tarpaulin and corrugated iron provided by relief organizations have replaced the bamboo and teak houses that the winds carried away.

In the village of Sewa, Nargis pulled the school clean off the foundation and tossed it aside, leaving a pile of bamboo sticks and mutilated chairs in its place. But today students recite lessons in a brand-new building that sits next door.

Relief supplies have helped villagers rebuild every house in the village, and all residents now have a roof over their heads.

But aid agencies say that while such aid has made the difference in averting the worst-case scenarios predicted in Nargis's wake, without a massive relief increase the situation will remain dire.

"Most of the housing is temporary and we still haven't shifted gears to provide any long-term solutions, such as permanent housing," says an official from a leading international NGO.

Survivors help one another

To fill the gap, local communities have banded together to ensure their survival. In Mya Sein Ken, villagers invited farmers from nearby villages that lost all of their land to plant their seed in paddies that survived the storm.

An informal loan network has developed, where some villages pool their resources to lend cash and goods to other areas in need.

In Sewa, hundreds of villagers scavenged for used building materials and rebuilt the destroyed stupa in the center of town, without a drop of outside help.

"We have no choice but to rely on each other," says the village elder in Mya Sein Ken. "We have to do what we can to repair our lives."

How to help

Church World Service

P.O. Box 968

Elkhart, IN, 46515

800-297-1516

https://secure.churchworldservice.org/catalog/display.php?product_id=313

Habitat for Humanity

International

121 Habitat Street

Americus, GA 31709

800-422-4828

<https://www.habitat.org/cd/giving/donate.aspx?link=147>

Mercy Corps

Department W

P.O. Box 2669

Portland, OR 97208

888-256-1900

<http://www.mercycorps.org>

Partners Relief and Development

P.O. Box 27220

Albuquerque, NM 87125-7220

(505) 248-9842

<http://www.partnersworld.org/cyclone.html>

Save the Children

54 Wilton Road

Westport, CT 06880

800-728-3843

https://secure.ga4.org/01/cyclone_nargis

United States Fund for UNICEF

125 Maiden Lane

New York, NY 10038

800-486-4233

<http://www.supportunicef.org/site/pp.asp?c=9fLEJ5OALpE&b=1023561>

World Vision

P.O. Box 9716, Dept. W
Federal Way, WA 98063-9716
888-511-6548
http://donate.wvus.org/OA_HTML/xxwvibeCCtPltmDspRte.jsp?item=1712646§ion=10025

Worldwide Impact Now
Attn: Burma Cyclone Relief Fund
30802 Coast Hwy, SPC F20
Laguna Beach, CA 92651
(913) 240-1627
http://www.worldwide-impact-now.org/pages/ways2help/Donate/donate_myanmar.html

Compiled by Leigh Montgomery

Myanmar: True humanitarian heroes

[AlertNet](#) - 30 Sep 2008 13:30:00 GMT

Source: [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\) - Switzerland](#)

By Lasse Norgaard, regional communications delegate, Bangkok

Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers in Myanmar have been helping those affected by Cyclone Nargis from the very early hours of May 3. They assisted with rescue operations, transportation, first aid, blood donations and built temporary shelters. A number of volunteers had experienced personal losses, but chose to stay on duty.

"I do not hesitate to call these volunteers humanitarian heroes," says Bridget Gardner, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) delegation in Myanmar.

"The volunteers worked tirelessly round the clock and helped thousands of people with an unparalleled commitment and enthusiasm. Years from now, we will probably all remember this relief operation because of the actions of these volunteers."

Personal sacrifice

When the wind died down around six o'clock on the morning of May 3, Than Kyaw, a Myanmar Red Cross volunteer and local leader, began knocking on the doors of a few wealthy people in the village whose houses had withstood the cyclone. He was seeking small donations.

An hour later, he bought as much medicine and medical equipment as he could from the local pharmacy. By 07:30, he had opened a small temporary clinic at the local temple where many wounded people had gathered. In the days and weeks ahead, many more were brought to this same location to receive assistance.

"I asked some of them to stay behind and help me to search for wounded people and bring them here," Than Kyaw recalls.

Water and wind

Many of the survivors had been injured while they clung desperately to trees as the cyclone raged around them. Their backs had been sandblasted by the water and wind.

These wounds were treated and disinfected by the Red Cross volunteers, not only in Than Kyaw's village, but throughout the delta. This meant that the clinics and hospitals had more time and capacity to treat the seriously injured.

Than Kyaw's own house was damaged and its roof was blown off. Now, more than four months later, the repair work is almost complete. Than Kyaw relied on his son and relatives to rebuild his house, while he was busy assisting his fellow villagers.

Back on track

"Life is getting better, but people need tools and boats to earn an income and get their lives back on track," Thar Kyaw notes. "Right now we are all very fragile, particularly if another storm hits."

San San Mar, the manager of the local Red Cross hub office, was sent to a village in the Labutta area to support the local staff and volunteers. She always carried her big phone in a basket, always working, always encouraging her staff and volunteers, and constantly smiling and laughing.

The only exception was when she sat with a woman who had lost her husband, her children and everything else. San San Mar empathized with her predicament, and cried with her.

Outstanding

"We could not have achieved anything without our volunteers, they have been outstanding," says Prof. Dr. Tha Hla Shwe, the president of the Myanmar Red Cross. "They have not only helped with the Red Cross Red Crescent operation, but also in the distribution of aid from other humanitarian organizations."

The volunteers are so very dedicated and committed to their assignments that it has been difficult to persuade them to rest and take time off.

Prof. Dr. Shwe notes that it is therapeutic for the volunteers to help other vulnerable cases, though they too need support to overcome their losses. "When you ask them about their own experiences and losses, some of them break down," he says.

Website: <http://www.ifrc.org>