



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

APRIL
2010

Burma's Generals begin transition to 'Civilian' Dictatorship

Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein and around 20 other military officers in government positions resigned their military ranks in April, in what has been seen as the beginning of the transition of Burma from a military to civilian dictatorship. On 29 April, Thein Sein registered a new political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which is the new political party being formed from the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

Since it was announced in 2003, Burma Campaign UK has been warning that the generals' so-called road map to democracy is a sham aimed at maintaining dictatorship. The entire process is designed to ensure the corrupt military and business elite maintain power and control over Burma and its natural resources.

Burma Campaign UK is calling on the UN, EU and others to stop trying to reform the generals' roadmap and elections, which has been the main focus of their diplomatic efforts for the past seven years, and instead focus on what they have said should happen, which is tri-partite dialogue between the regime, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, and genuine ethnic representatives.



EU extends Burma sanctions and calls on regime to stop breaking international law

On 26 April, the European Union (EU) renewed sanctions against Burma for a further year, and called on Burma to "end to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law." In March the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma called for a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

Key points from EU:

- Sanctions maintained.
- Regime must end violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Elections not credible.
- Regime must enter into dialogue with opposition and ethnic groups.
- EU willing to enter into high-level dialogue.

The extension of sanctions will disappoint some European governments and international NGOs. Some have argued for a policy of appeasement towards Burma's generals, calling on the EU to relax sanctions. However, Burma's democracy movement and Burma Campaign UK have argued that relaxing sanctions would be a green light to the generals to increase human rights abuses, help finance

increased abuses, and give up potential leverage against the regime.

The fact that the EU has chosen to prioritise in its conclusions the call for dialogue with opposition and ethnic groups is significant. The Burma Campaign UK has been calling on the EU to focus on this rather than continuous efforts to reform the general's so-called roadmap to democracy, all of which have failed. The UN Security Council, UN General Assembly and UN Secretary General have all said this kind of tri-partite dialogue is the proper mechanism that should be used for solving the problems in Burma.

International community ignores danger of Burma sliding into war

28 April marked the final deadline for armed ethnic groups which have signed ceasefire agreements with the dictatorship in Burma to agree to become border guard forces or militias under the control of the Burmese Army.

The demand is part of the generals' agenda to destroy all opposition ahead of elections designed to maintain their rule under a civilian guise. Many of the ceasefire groups play an important role

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in protecting and promoting ethnic culture. The dictatorship's new constitution does not grant ethnic people any real level of autonomy, or grant any protection or promotion of ethnic cultures.

Many of the largest ceasefire groups have refused to become border guard forces. They see the demands as breaking ceasefire agreements and amounting to unconditional surrender, without any of their demands for autonomy and ethnic rights being granted. The ceasefire groups took part in the National Convention, which drew up the principles of the new constitution, but every single one of their proposals was rejected. All the ceasefire groups which have rejected the generals' demands have indicated that while they will not start any violence, they will defend themselves if attacked. There is a real risk of the Burmese Army attacking ceasefire groups, resulting in a huge humanitarian and human rights crisis.



Czech Republic backs Commission of Inquiry

The Czech Republic has become the third country to publicly support a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, following announcements by Australia and the UK in March.

The Czech government stated:
"The Czech Republic remains concerned at continuous grave human rights violations in Burma/ Myanmar. Despite the Government's "Roadmap to Democracy" and before the expected this year's elections, political repression, and military attacks against civilians of ethnic nationalities continue in scale and gravity that may entail international crimes under the terms of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We believe that the possibility of establishing a Commission of Inquiry should be seriously examined."

Political Prisoner denied medical treatment



Ko Mya Aye, one of the leaders of 88 Generation Students Group, which led protests in 1988 and again in 2007, is being denied access to proper medical treatment he urgently needs for a heart condition.

He is currently detained Taungyi Prison in Shan State, many miles from emergency medical care, and too far away for family to make regular visits.

Ko Mya Aye appears to be suffering from angina, which has recently become unstable causing heart failure and requiring urgent medical treatment. He is also suffering from hypertension and gastric problems. He needs proper medical tests that can only be done in Rangoon, and will probably require an angioplasty operation or coronary artery bypass graft. So far there have been none of the required medical tests or operations.

Ko Mya Aye is also being held in conditions which are making his health condition much worse. On his arrival in the jail he was put in a cell which is for death row prisoners, and denied any exercise. There is no toilet or running water in the cell and he has to go toilet in an open field by the prison with no privacy.

Burma's generals systematically use the denial of medical treatment to mistreat and abuse political prisoners. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) estimates that 137 political prisoners are in poor health as a result of harsh medical conditions or being denied proper medical care.

Bomb attacks across Burma

In April, there was a series of bomb attacks across the country, adding to tensions after announcement of the election laws in March.

On April 15, 3 bombs exploded in a pavilion at the annual water festival in Rangoon, which killed 10 and injured 170. It is the worst incident of its kind since 2005, when 19 people died. State-run

newspapers said terrorists were responsible for the blasts, but no group was named.

Another series of bombings occurred at the Myitsone dam project in Kachin State on April 17, which included around 10 bomb blasts and injured mostly Chinese workers. The Myitsone hydropower project is the first of seven hydropower projects in Kachin State. The construction of the dam is likely to displace about 15,000 people in total. As well as displacement, dam projects in Burma also lead to increased military presence, human rights abuses, and irreversible environmental damage.

For a full list of all the bombings, see The Irrawaddy: http://www.irrawaddy.org/research_show.php?art_id=18344

Ethnic groups reject elections

The Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) has rejected Burma's election laws as one-sided in supporting only the military junta and the 2008 constitution as undemocratic. The ENC met at the end of March on the Thai-Burma border. It was attended by 35 representatives of political organizations from 7 ethnic states: Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Arakan, Chin, Mon and Shan states.

NLD Statement: "A Message to the People of Burma"

National League for Democracy No 97(B) West Shwegondine Street, Bahan Township, Rangoon
6th April 2010 (Unofficial Translation)

1. The National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed with a commitment to establish democratic system in Burma, which the people of Burma demanded unanimously during the 1988 nationwide pro-democracy uprising.

Since its inception, NLD has consistently tried to:

- (1) Establish a true democratic government in Burma
- (2) Fully achieve fundamental human rights
- (3) Firmly lay the foundation of democracy to prevent the re-emergence of a dictatorial regime in the future
- (4) Perpetuate the Union with equality among all ethnic nationalities
- (5) Contribute for the peace in the world by improving the lives and development of the people and stability in the country of Burma

To achieve these afore-mentioned aims, the NLD leaders and members have tried to achieve national reconciliation, a necessary and fundamental requirement of democracy, through a great deal of sacrifices.

2. In the 1990 multi-party general election, NLD won 392 seats out of 485 contested seats. This was a mandate given by the people of Burma for the NLD to lead them toward a democratic society. Therefore, the Members of Parliament-elect of the NLD aimed to achieve national reconciliation, convene the Parliament, and solve the problems in Burma peacefully. Hoping to realize meaningful political dialogue with the regime, NLD leaders and its MPs attended the National Convention, held by then State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). NLD MPs had participated in the National Convention process and tried hard to draft a democratic constitution. However, these attempts were not successful. SPDC refused to convene the Parliament with the elected MPs, and the rightful Parliament was never allowed to emerge.

3. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of NLD, is deeply committed to solving the problems by peaceful means through meaningful dialogue. She has tried hard repeatedly to have a dialogue with the leaders of the military. She continues to call for a dialogue with the military regime while under house arrest. As soon as she was released from house arrest (in 1995 and 2000), she continued to call for dialogue.

Aung San Suu Kyi escaped an assassination attempt in the Depayin massacre in 2003. Even so, she didn't consider revenge and continued to call for the military regime to establish a political dialogue. In 2009, she was again given a prison sentence when an American citizen, Mr. John Yettaw, arrived at her house unwelcomed. She still continued to call for the regime to meet and discuss for the interest of the country. In her latest letter to Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of SPDC, she wrote that "she requests Senior General to grant a meeting to discuss for the lifting of economic sanctions".

To sum up, numerous attempts by the NLD leaders, members, and MPs-elect to establish a system of democracy in Burma and for national reconciliation were obvious, fully recorded, and have been ignored by the SPDC, rendering their attempts unsuccessful.

4. Now, the SPDC issued a set of electoral laws, including the Election Commission Law, Political Parties Registration Law, Peoples' Parliament Election Law, National Parliament Election Law, Region (or) State Parliaments Election Law, and by-laws, with the aim of holding elections in 2010. These laws are unjust, undemocratic and not in line with the basic characters of the law.

Throughout history, peoples have built their

associations and societies based on justice. When we compared these laws with the society of the people of Burma, we found that these laws are obviously not free and fair for our society. They are not in line with principles of democracy, such as distributive justice, natural equality, and political equality. These laws also go against universal ethics. Furthermore, forcing parties to pledge to obey and abide the 2008 Constitution is a violation of democracy and human rights. These laws ignore the demands of an all-party inclusive election made by the UN Secretary-General and the international community.

5. Considering these facts, the Central Committee of the NLD met on March 29, 2010, and decided without objection that the NLD shall not re-register the party at the Election Commission, as the electoral laws issued by the SPDC are unfair and unjust.

6. Standing by the people, the NLD has made persevering efforts for the emergence of democracy and national reconciliation while enduring arrests, punishment, intimidation, disturbances and all sorts of restrictions by the authorities. Nevertheless, all these efforts were to no avail as a result of one-sided suppression and annihilation by the authorities. The NLD would like to sincerely and earnestly apologize to the people of Burma for these vain attempts.

7. However, the NLD will never turn its back on the people of Burma or on its struggle for democracy. We pledge to continue to achieve our goals for democracy through systematic, peaceful and nonviolent means, guided by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who said that "I would like to speak to the people of Burma that I will try as much as I can to continue an effort to achieve democracy in Burma."

As per decision made by the Central Executive Committee meeting on April 5, 2010
Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy
Rangoon

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**for Human Rights, Democracy
& Development in Burma**