

NLD say Gambari's trip a 'waste of time'

UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari visited Burma from 18-23 August. However, his trip ended in yet another failure as he failed to make any breakthrough and junta leader Than Shwe refused to meet him. Aung San Suu Kyi also refused to meet Gambari on this trip.

Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), have condemned Gambari's visits for failing to produce any positive developments. An NLD spokesman said, "Mr Gambari has made six visits to Burma, but nothing has happened. We consider it a waste of time." In a statement issued on 28 August, the NLD also criticised Gambari for offering to help the junta prepare for elections in 2010. The 2010 elections are part of the regime's sham 'roadmap' process designed to enshrine military rule and based on a fraudulent constitutional referendum in May.



Gambari was also criticised for spending just 1 hour 20 minutes with the NLD during his 6 day trip, while spending the rest of his time with the regime, pro-regime organisations and business cronies. Twelve ethnic opposition leaders had requested a meeting with Gambari but the regime refused their request.

The human rights situation in the country has taken a dramatic downward turn since Gambari first visited Burma in May 2006 and declared that the regime had turned a new page with the international community. Since then:

- The number of political prisoners almost doubled from 1,100 to 2,056.
- More than 130,000 people in Eastern Burma have been forced from their homes as part of the regime's ethnic cleansing campaign.
- September 2007's peaceful pro-democracy protests were brutally suppressed, with protestors fired on and thousands of monks arrested.
- Humanitarian aid was blocked following Cyclone Nargis.
- Political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, have been routinely denied access to doctors and medical treatment.

Gambari had been scheduled to meet Aung San Suu Kyi on 20 August but she did not attend the meeting. It appears that the reason Aung San Suu Kyi did not meet Gambari is that she was insisting on meeting him with the rest of the NLD Committee. However, instead of supporting her, Gambari went to her house to try to meet her individually, in effect undermining her and the point she was making.

The regime newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, reported Gambari as having said, "both the UN Secretary-General and him [Gambari] accept that economic sanctions are a serious impediment to national development of Myanmar" and "he will continue striving for opposition parties to cooperate; the UN Secretary-General is trying its best for the international community to respond in a positive manner to prevailing situations of Myanmar."

Following the trip, the United States condemned the regime for its refusal to cooperate with the United Nations and to live up to its commitments on political reform, including the release of political prisoners and to engage in a credible and time-bound dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and ethnic minority leaders. These actions were specifically called for in the UN Security Council's Presidential Statement of October 11, 2007.

Gambari's Meetings Aug 18-20, 2008

August 18

- Arrived Rangoon in the morning
- Met Foreign Minister Nyan Win at National Defence College at 1:00pm
- Met Diplomats and officials from foreign missions at Seinle Kantha State House at 2:15pm
- Met ICRC at the same place at 3:00pm
- Met Tripartite Core Group at the same place at 3:55pm
- Dinner with Nyan Win at Mya Yeik Nyo Royal Hotel in the evening

August 19

- Visiting Rehabilitation Camp (Central) in Kungyangon Township
- Met the SPDC's Spokes Authoritative Team, comprised of Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan, Nyan Win and Maj-Gen Khin Aung Myint at National Defence College at 3:00pm
- Dinner with them at Mya Yeik Nyo Royal Hotel in the evening

August 20

- Failed meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at Seinle Kantha State House in the morning
- Met with U Soe Thar, Minister of National Planning and Economic Development
- Met with 10 groups including 20 minutes with NLD from 2:00 to 6:00pm.

All of these groups, except NLD, are pro-regime groups:

14:00: Meeting with members of Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Organization that provided funds for members of Swan Arr Shin to attack protesters during the Saffron Revolution)

14:30: Meeting with KNU splinter and defector groups led by Maj-Gen Kyaw Than (DKBA), Saw Tha Mu He, Pfado Aung San, and Maj-Gen Htein Maung (defected commander of KNU's seventh brigade)

15:00: Meeting with NLD CEC

15:30: Meeting with 88 Generation Students and Youths (Union of Myanmar) led by Aye Lwin (former student leader in 1988 and now working for the regime)

15:50: Meeting the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) – ethnic splinter group working with the regime.

16:10: Meeting with a pro-regime splinter group from NLD, led by Dr. Soe Lin

16:30: Meeting with MPs-elect in an individual capacity

16:50: Meeting with Students of Modern Science and Political Economy (a group of former Red-Flag Communist Party members who are now the puppets of the regime)

17:10: Meeting with National Unity Party (NUP) - formed by the junta to take part in the 1990 elections)

17:40: Meeting with Union Solidarity and Development Organization (USDA) – the pro-regime militia group that attacked Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003.

Protestors worldwide mark 8/8/88 anniversary

Protests were held on 8th August worldwide to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 8/8/88 uprising and massacre in Burma. The protests called for the release of the over 2,000 political prisoners held in Burma today. It will never be known how many people died in the military crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 1988, but estimates range from 3,000-10,000.

Over 200 protestors gathered outside the Burmese Embassy in London. Wai Hnin, Political Prisoner Campaigner at the Burma Campaign UK, said "From today we will be stepping up our campaign for the release of political prisoners." Wai Hnin's father, Mya Aye, is currently being held in Insein jail, Rangoon.



8/8/88 anniversary demonstrators imprisoned

Five NLD youth members were sentenced to two and a half years in jail on 15 August. The activists were among 48 activists arrested on 8 August in Arakan State after demonstrating on the 20th anniversary of the 8/8/88 crackdown. Some of the protestors wore white T-shirts bearing the slogan 8-8-88. The Burmese authorities released the other 43 prisoners.

Security forces were present in large numbers on the streets of Burma's major city, Rangoon. Although no major protests were held, there were public signs of descent as baskets of flowers bearing pro-democracy slogans were left by roadsides. Other activists launched a "Red Campaign", spraying red paint on the walls of schools and other public places in Rangoon.

UN admits loss of more than \$1.5 million of cyclone aid

The United Nations has admitted that over the past three months about \$1.56 million dollars of aid money for victims of Cyclone Nargis has been lost because of the regime's foreign exchange controls. Under Burma's foreign exchange rules, dollars brought in by foreign agencies must be converted into Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC) at government banks, and then converted into the local kyat currency. FECs are officially equal to the dollar but in reality they are worth much less. This has been a problem for years but until now the UN has done nothing to challenge how the regime takes aid money in this way.

Daniel Baker, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Burma, said in press statement on 13 August, "The loss in value due to foreign exchange for the Cyclone Nargis international humanitarian aid during the last three months has been about USD 1.56 million. We are not getting the full value of dollars donated for emergency relief, and donors are extremely worried and keen to see that this issue is resolved."

Following an international outcry over the exchange rate fraud, UN officials have now announced that the regime has agreed to let international humanitarian agencies pay local companies directly using bank transfers in US dollars rather than via FECs.

New UN Human Rights envoy visits Burma

Tomas Ojea Quintana, the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, made his first visit to Burma in August. He met five prominent political prisoners in Insein Prison, including U Win Tin, a 78-year-old journalist who is Burma's longest-serving political prisoner, pro-democracy activist Su Su Nway and Buddhist monk U Gambira, who helped lead the demonstrations last September. During the trip Ojea Quintana also briefly met senior officials from the National League for Democracy and toured parts of the Irrawaddy Delta devastated by Cyclone Nargis.

Following the visit, Ojea Quintana was scheduled to give a press conference in Bangkok on 13 August but it was cancelled at the last minute without explanation. However, in earlier comments to the press, Ojea Quintana gave a surprisingly positive report, saying he was certain that the regime was ready to cooperate with him. He also commented that "The prison conditions of the political prisoners I saw were not so bad." This is in contrast to human rights reports from Burma that suggest the treatment of political prisoners is getting worse. The Burma Campaign UK has received reports from sources in Burma that the regime is now confining political prisoners to their cells without exercise periods, and is stopping families from bringing them extra food and other supplies to top up the meagre food rations. Most seriously, the regime appears to be systematically denying medical treatment to political prisoners.

15 year-old schoolgirl gang-raped and mutilated by Burmese soldiers

Burmese Army soldiers gang-raped, mutilated and murdered a 15 year old schoolgirl in Kachin State Burma. The incident took place on 27th July 2008 near Nam Sai Village, Bamaw District, Kachin State, northern Burma. The schoolgirl, Nhkum Hkawn Din, was attacked and killed on her way to bring rice to her brother, who was working on a paddy field on the family farm. After a three-day search her naked and mutilated body was found 200 metres from an army checkpoint.

The Burma Campaign UK has received reports that the family has been offered around \$500 plus some food staples as compensation for the

murder. However, the family says that it wants justice, not money. Local army commanders have now admitted that one of their soldiers carried out the attack but local people are reportedly angry that the regime is pinning the blame on just one low ranking soldier, witnesses saw more than one soldier following the schoolgirl, including a local colonel. That colonel has now apparently been reassigned to another area.

Sources in Kachin state report that rapes and killings by Burmese Army soldiers in Kachin State are common, but usually go unreported as families fear punishment by the regime.

Insurers pull out as Burma Campaign UK shames industry

Two major insurers, XL and ARIG, are pulling out of Burma only weeks after the Burma Campaign UK published its report, Insuring Repression, highlighting how insurance companies have facilitated the flow of billions of dollars to the Burmese regime.

XL Capital stated that the company now has a policy that it will no longer “seek to insure Burmese companies or operations of companies in Burma.” XL Capital owns one of the 12 largest reinsurers in the world, XL Re, and a large Lloyd’s of London syndicate, XL London Market, which has in the past insured a Burmese regime owned airline. Arab Insurance Group (Arig) has also confirmed that it has pulled out of the Burmese insurance market. The company stated “After a review of the current situation Arig has taken the corporate decision to refrain from renewing any of the isolated risks previously written in Myanmar”.

14 insurers, including Catlin, Ariel and Lloyd’s of London remain on the Insurance Dirty List and the Burma Campaign UK is calling on the British government to push for targeted financial sanctions at the EU which would force European insurers and European citizens to stop helping to fund the Burmese regime.

China looks to expand defence links with Burma

China is eager to expand military cooperation with Burma, with a view to “safeguard regional stability” according to media reports. The Chinese Defence Minister also praised Burma’s

support for the One China policy, relating to Taiwan, as Burma confirmed it would continue to support the policy.

China has also recently sent over 200 more military trucks to the regime. The 3500 military trucks were delivered via Ruili, a town on the China-Burma border. It is reported that the FAW branded trucks will be used by military and police units across Burma. They are to be sent to Mandalay where they will be dispatched to military units. It is reported that the trucks are regarded as junk in China; they are sold to the Burmese regime instead of being scrapped. Reports suggest that whilst the trucks are mainly used in military units, a limited number have been active in the Irrawaddy delta region.

Aung San Suu Kyi allowed lawyer visit



Aung San Suu Kyi has been allowed to meet her lawyer for the first time in five years. It is believed Aung San Suu Kyi was briefed on the law which has been used to confine her without trial. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate has been under arrest since May 2003 and has spent a total of more than 12 years in detention. The lawyer reportedly stated that Aung San Suu Kyi appeared to be in very good health.

In May 2008 her house arrest was extended by one year, despite the law under which she is imprisoned stating that no one can be held longer than five years without being released or put on trial. In June the regime’s newspaper, New Light of Myanmar, said detentions are permissible for a maximum of six years under a 1975 “Law Safeguarding the State from Dangers of Subversive Elements.” The regime has refused to accept an attempt to appeal the extension of Aung San Suu Kyi’s detention by her party, the National League for Democracy.

US calls for release of political prisoners

The US State Department has called for the release of Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and

all other pro-democracy activists, on the anniversary of their arrest a year ago for their role in organising peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations. The statement continued “The United States renews its call for the regime to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, Min Ko Naing, and Ko Ko Gyi, and an end to the regime’s attempts to intimidate and silence those who seek the promotion of democracy and human rights in Burma.”

The US reiterated that the regime must engage in a meaningful and time-bound dialogue with Burma’s democratic and ethnic minority leaders to bring about a credible transition to democracy on top of lifting restrictions on the operations of all humanitarian organizations in Burma, including those working on issues other than cyclone relief.

Democracy leader’s parents jailed for 6 years

The parents of Ko Sithu Maung, one of the leaders of the All-Burmese Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), were sentenced to six years in prison for obstructing police investigations, harassing officers on duty and inciting riots. The couple, both in their fifties, were originally arrested in October 2007 when they delayed answering their door to police who were looking for their son.

In court the couple stated that the police came to their door late at night, without a warrant and were not accompanied by local officials. The couple stated that they delayed opening the door as they did not know who was knocking at their door. Their son, Ko Sithu Maung, has been awaiting trial in Insein prison since October 2007 after being caught providing a safe house for two other ABFSU leaders.

Indonesia says pressure growing on UN to act

Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda, has stated that the UN Security Council is under “growing pressure” to take steps against the Burmese regime if it doesn’t take credible steps towards democracy. Wirajuda stated that the other members of ASEAN were working with China and other countries to try and push the regime towards genuine democratic reform. Describing Burma as a “difficult issue” he added that Indonesia was doing what it could to help

democracy in Burma. He said that “Myanmar claims to have a new constitution and these elections will be multi-party elections, but what is important for us at ASEAN is to ensure that a more credible process is taking place” and that the “follow-up transfer of power” in 2010 had to be “acceptable to the international community.”

Reports of voting fraud in Burmese Embassy, Malaysia

Another example of how the regime rigged the May referendum has emerged, with reports of voting fraud during the referendum in the Burmese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A source has revealed that authorities expected to get around 170,000 voters in Malaysia but only 17,000 people voted, even after the deadline was extended. Embassy officials were reportedly instructed to get 6000 more ‘Yes’ votes, with staff members creating 200 fictional ‘Yes’ votes per day.

Burmese MPs denied place in ASEAN assembly

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly has rejected a request by an organization of Burmese MPs elected in the 1990 election, the Members of Parliament Union (MPU), to attend meetings of the assembly.

In a statement, the MPU said, “we are extremely disappointed with the decision ... we remind the Executive Committee that we, and not the current military junta, are the democratically elected representatives of the people of Burma. By denying us our right to be a part of this Assembly, the Executive Committee has denied the voice of the suffering people of Burma to be heard. This decision also makes a mockery of the ASEAN Charter in which ASEAN countries have agreed to adhere to principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Regime’s business crony leaves workers unpaid

Htoo Trading has pulled out of a redevelopment program in a cyclone hit area of Burma, without paying local workers for their labour. Htoo Trading is owned by Tay Za, who has very close links to Senior General Than Shwe. Htoo Trading used workers from Bogalay township in the Delta region to rebuild houses destroyed by

the cyclone but stopped the project because it was not profitable. The company later sold the houses to locals for 1.5 million Kyat, to be paid in installments. The company agreed to pay carpenters a daily wages of 5000 Kyat a day but the workers are still waiting for their wages.

Comedian Zaganar charged with public order offences

Famous comedian and leading activist Zaganar has been charged with public order offences and could face up to two years in prison. He was arrested on 3 June after organizing a relief effort for cyclone victims from private donors and publicly criticizing the regime for their response to Cyclone Nargis. According to reports from an opposition lawyer, Zaganar was charged with “inducing public offence” at a secret hearing inside Rangoon’s Insein prison. However, his family members had not been informed of any court appearance or trial date.

Prominent Monk U Gambira charged with 10 offences

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), U Gambira, leader of the All Burma Monks’ Alliance, has been disrobed by the authorities and appeared in court on 20 August charged with 10 offences he allegedly committed in the aftermath of the September 2007 uprising. 10 other people detained in connection with last September’s demonstrations were also charged. AAPP said at least seven detained monks, including U Gambira, are in poor health. The AAPP reports that 196 monks are among Burma’s more than 2,000 political prisoners.

Human rights activists arrested

At least 39 human rights and pro-democracy activists were arrested during August and 21 were given prison sentences, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Those arrested include prominent human rights activist Myint Aye, who was arrested on the 20th anniversary of the nationwide pro-democracy protests in 1988. The reason for the arrest was unknown. Myint Aye is the founder of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters group. On 27 August five NLD members were arrested in Rangoon’s Hlaing Tharyar township for holding a peaceful protest calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi on 15 May.

44 children die of starvation in famine-hit Chin State

The famine in Chin State, North-west Burma, has killed 44 children who were suffering from malnutrition and diarrhea, according to the Chin National Councils. Faced with starvation, around 2,000 villagers have fled to Mizoram State, North-east India. The famine has been caused by a plague of rats that destroyed the rice crop in Chin State earlier this year. The regime has said that it provided rat poison and around 1000 bags of rice to the affected areas but the locals say that they haven’t received any aid from local authorities.

Thai PM calls Aung San Suu Kyi ‘political tool’ of West

Thailand’s Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej has provoked anger among Burma’s democracy movement by describing Aung San Suu Kyi as a ‘tool’ of the West. He said, “Europe uses Aung San Suu Kyi as a political tool. If it’s not related to Aung San Suu Kyi, you can have deeper discussions with Myanmar (Burma).” He made the comments during a meeting with UN Envoy Ibrahim Gambari in Bangkok on his return from his latest failed mission in Burma.

US President and First Lady meet Burma activists and refugees

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the 1988 democracy uprising, President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush met Burmese human rights activists in Thailand. President Bush held an hour-long meeting with Burmese activists in Bangkok on 7 August. Laura Bush travelled to the Thai-Burma border to visit refugees at the Mae La refugee camp. She also visited the Mae Tao Clinic, which provides free medical care to refugees.

Cyclone survivors living in ‘dire conditions’

More than three months after Cyclone Nargis, thousands of villagers are still in desperate need and lack the basic necessities of food and shelter. “Much more urgently needs to be done in remote areas where affected communities are still living in dire conditions,” said Daniel Baker, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Burma. Chris Kaye, World Food Programme (WFP) country director, said, “The situation in Myanmar remains dire. The vast majority of families simply don’t have enough to eat.”

According to a recent Post-Nargis Joint Assessment report, 42 percent of all food stocks were destroyed and 55 percent of families only had stocks for one day or less. It estimates that 924,000 people will need food assistance until the November harvest this year, and around 300,000 will need relief until April 2009.

Regime requires cyclone aid to be repaid

In Bogalay, in the southern delta region, there are reports that the regime is giving aid to cyclone survivors on credit and requiring them to pay back the cost of any aid received. According to a report from AFP, a regime official said, "The government will distribute everything for them through a payback system. Otherwise, controlling the aid will be very difficult." One farmer said, "We have received power tillers and diesel on credit from the government. Even then, we still need more help to get bank loans so that we will have cash to hire field hands."

Kuwait discusses investment in Burma

A Kuwaiti government delegation met Burmese regime officials, led by Prime Minister General Thein Sein, on 27 August to discuss investment in various business sectors, including the agricultural sector. A state level delegation, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al Mohammad Al Ahmad Al-Sabah, visited Burma earlier in August to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Myanmar Federation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI).

"The Kuwait side is very willing to invest in various business sectors in Myanmar using their money earned from oil sales. But the area in which they are most eager to make deal with us is contract farming," said U Tun Aung, a central executive member of the UMFCCI, in an interview with The Myanmar Times newspaper.

Statement by National League for Democracy

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29 August 2008

Special Statement No. 15/08/ 08
(Unofficial Translation)

1. From 1994 to 2007, the United Nations General Assembly successively adopted

resolutions on Burma that call [for the Burmese military regime] to;

- (a) Implement the result of the 1990 elections,
- (b) Establish a democratic country, and
- (c) Commence the meaningful political dialogue (with democratic opposition parties).

On 11 October 2007, the United Nations Security Council also issued a Presidential Statement on the situation in Burma, in which the Security Council called (for the Burmese military government) to;

- (1) Release all political prisoners and detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, immediately and unconditionally, and
- (2) Commence meaningful political dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, political parties and ethnic leaders, immediately.

We found no tangible progress from the recent visit of Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, on 18-23 August, which was the sixth of its kind, to facilitate the UNGA resolutions and UNSC Presidential Statement on Burma.

2. During the visit, Mr. Gambari was not able to meet with senior officials of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) [official name of the Burmese military regime], who are the real decision makers. He also couldn't meet and discuss the situation with ethnic political parties that won significant seats in the 1990 elections, ethnic leaders, as well as leaders of democracy forces. He only followed the arrangements of the SPDC and spent most of the time, which is precious and irreplaceable, without any benefit.

3. When the leaders of the NLD met Mr. Gambari (on 20 August), NLD leaders explained that the 1990 multi-party election results, which represented the decision and free will of the voters, should not be ignored, and that without honoring the free will of the people of Burma demonstrated in the 1990 election, establishing a democratic country could not be possible, and asked him how would he considered the 1990 election result. Mr. Gambari didn't answer that question.

4. NLD leaders also explained to him that the 2008 constitution, which was approved by the SPDC, is actually written by the SPDC

without having the right to do so, that the referendum held in May 2008 was also not a process in which the people could express their real desire, but a step to approve the constitution forcibly by use of fraud, threats and vote-rigging, and that the NLD has already declared clearly that it would not recognize the referendum and the constitution. Therefore, NLD leaders asked Mr. Gambari not to consider and speak for the upcoming election.

5. Despite our concerns, when he met with the Spokes Authoritative Team of the SPDC, Mr. Gambari advised that “the SPDC should accept expertise from the United Nations in the general election to be held in 2010 in order to win the trust of the international community”, and “UN would like to coordinate matters for rendering expertise after the election commission has been formed.” Hence, general dissatisfactions (on his performance) among the Burmese people are now growing.

6. The NLD Chairman told Mr. Gambari that for him to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is within the control of the SPDC, [as she is a detainee of the regime]. However, Mr. Gambari requested the NLD to find a way for him to meet with her. Then, NLD Chairman and Secretary told him to try to have a meeting between the NLD leaders and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, with the impression that there may be a good result if Mr. Gambari meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

7. Mr. Gambari came to Burma six times with his diplomatic mission. However, we found no development whatsoever as of today such as; (1) Release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, (2) Realizing of meaningful political dialogue between the SPDC, and democracy forces including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and (3) Democratization in Burma.

As per decision made by the Central Executive Committee meeting on 28 August 2008, Rangoon Central Executive Committee National League for Democracy

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**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
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**CAMPAIGNING
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**