



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

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Aung San Suu Kyi Appeal Rejection Shows No Change In Burma

On 26 February, the Supreme Court in Burma rejected Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal against her detention.

Aung San Suu Kyi had appealed against her latest detention, following a sham trial after an American man entered her home without her permission. She has now spent more than 14 years in detention. She is due to be released from house arrest in November this year, a month after fake elections being planned by Burma's generals.

This is the latest in a series of actions the dictatorship has taken which demonstrate that there is no genuine reform on the way. Campaigners called on the UN to acknowledge that the regime's fake elections will not bring change, and instead to renew efforts to enforce Security Council and General Assembly demands for dialogue between the generals, the National League for Democracy, and genuine ethnic representatives.



More than 2,100 Karen villagers in hiding after Burma Army attacks



On 5 February, seven Burma Army battalions burned more than 68 homes and a mobile health clinic in Toe Hta and Ka Di Mu Der in Eastern Pegu Division, Karen State. As a result, 2,100 Karen villagers fled into the jungle.

On 19th February one schoolboy was killed and two more injured when the Burmese Army fired a mortar bomb at a school in a temporary village for internally displaced people in Northern Karen State. Saw Raw Bee Moo was just 15 years old. He was taken to three different villages in a desperate attempt to

get medical assistance and equipment to save his life, but died at 3am on 21st February. The other two injured children, who are around 8-10 years old, were successfully treated. Approximately 350 villagers are hiding in the area after the attack. They had already been forced to flee their original villages because of attacks by the Burmese Army.

In the past 15 years more than 3,500 villages have been destroyed as the dictatorship continues its military offensive against ethnic civilians.

Bangladesh crackdown on Rohingyas

One year after Thailand forced hundreds of Rohingya refugees on boats from Burma back out to sea, stateless Rohingya asylum seekers now face persecution and starvation in Bangladesh.

During February hundreds of unregistered Rohingyas have been arrested, either pushed back across the border to Burma or sent to jail under immigration charges in Bangladesh. Bangladesh officials have targeted refugees settled outside the two official UNHCR refugee camps, which house 28,000 Rohingyas. After eviction or in fear of arrest and assault, thousands of Rohingyas have been forcibly displaced and most are now living in a makeshift camp for safety. The makeshift camp

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population has now increased to over 30,000. They do not receive food relief and cannot leave the camp to look for work or they could be arrested. They are now at risk of starvation.

“Hunger is spreading rapidly among the already malnourished population in the makeshift camp and a grave humanitarian crisis is looming. Bangladesh must end this crackdown at once or these refugees will start dying from starvation,” said Chris Lewa, Director of The Arakan Project.

The Rohingya are a persecuted Muslim minority in North Arakan State in Burma, rendered stateless and subject to severe human rights abuses, including restrictions of movement and on permission to marry, arbitrary arrest and forced labour.

UN Envoy sees no progress on human rights during visit to Burma

At the end of a 5-day mission to Burma in February, Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma, warned that there is no progress on human rights and stressed that the elections would not be fair unless all prisoners of conscience, including Suu Kyi, were released.

“Despite anticipation of landmark elections this year, I have not received any indication that the military government is willing to release all prisoners of conscience... Without full participation of the people including the 2200 prisoners of conscience and the environment that allows the parties to engage in the range of electoral activities, the elections to be held will not be credible,” Quintana said.

The envoy also criticised the junta for refusing to allow him to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or the junta chief, Than Shwe.

On the day that Quintana arrived in Burma, four women activists were sentenced to two years each of hard labour for ‘disturbing the peace’. They held regular prayers for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi at Rangoon’s Shwedagon Pagoda and donated books to a Buddhist monastery. Buddhist abbot Gaw Thita was also sentenced to seven years in jail during Quintana’s visit.

Burmese Junta convicts American political prisoner Nyi Nyi Aung

On 10 February, American citizen Nyi Nyi Aung was found guilty on false charges and sentenced to 5 years in prison with hard labour. The judge commuted the sentence to 3 years. Nyi Nyi Aung was found guilty of forging a national identity card; failing to declare currencies at customs; and failing

to renounce his Burmese citizenship.

Nyi Nyi Aung was arrested at Rangoon airport on September 3, 2009, attempting to visit his mother, also an imprisoned democracy activist, who has cancer and is being denied medical treatment. Since his detention, he has been tortured, denied consular access, denied access to his lawyers, and denied a public trial.

U Tin Oo Released



Senior NLD leader U Tin Oo was released from house arrest on 13 February. U Tin Oo is a founder member of the National League for Democracy, and a close confidant of Aung San Suu Kyi. He has been either jailed or under house arrest since a failed attempt by the regime to kill Aung San Suu Kyi in May 2003. A pro-government militia attacked the convoy that he and Aung San Suu Kyi were travelling in, in what became known as the Depayin massacre. At least one hundred people were killed in the attack. He was previously kept under house arrest from 1989 to 1995.

While the release was welcomed, campaigners stressed that there was no political significance to the release. Burmese democracy activists are regularly released when the generals want to score points with the international community, and are then arrested again later. The release was made on the eve of a visit by Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma.

Thailand starts then halts deportation of Karen refugees to Burma

On 5 February, Thailand started then halted the deportation of ethnic Karen refugees to a landmine-infested camp in Burma. Three families, nine women and four children, including a nine-month old baby, were forced back into Burma before the deportations were halted. The halt coincided with the arrival of foreign diplomats and NGOs. Thai authorities had originally blocked their entry to the camp.

3,000 refugees have been living in temporary camps since they fled a military offensive by the Burmese Army and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in June last year.

Thai authorities have been threatening and intimidating refugees to say that they want to return. The Karen Teachers Working Group have reported that 417 Karen refugees who have been living in Au Thu Hta temporary refugee camp have returned to Burma since the beginning of February. There are 1,460 refugees living in Au Thu Hta camp. A local leader said, "It was the refugees own decision to return to Burma but they received pressure from the Thai authorities. The authorities did not allow them to leave the camp in search of vegetables, which is their second main food source after rice. Therefore how can you stay where you are unable to gather food for your families." He added, "Over half the refugees who returned to Burma were students and children."

Migrant workers in Thailand face deportation

Human rights and migrant worker organisations are concerned that over 1.3 million migrant workers - the majority of whom are Burmese - could be deported from Thailand if they fail to enter the nationality verification process before the end of February.

A resolution passed in January ordered 1.3 million migrant workers to enter the nationality verification process in order to receive a two-year extension on work permits. However, many Burmese migrants fear for their safety and of repercussions against family members in Burma if they officially register. The UN Special Reporter on the Human Rights of Migrants, Human Rights Watch and the Karen Human Rights Group have publicly expressed concerns over the verification process and the risk it creates for the migrants.

Factory strikes ended by riot police

Over 3,600 workers, mainly women, from two Burmese shoe and garment factories went on strike on 8 February demanding an increase to their wages and improvement of working conditions at the factories. The military threatened a violent

crackdown if the factory workers did not disperse. About 50 trucks filled with armed riot police were sent to secure the roads surrounding the Hlaingtharyar Industrial Zone, just outside Rangoon. The workers ended the strike after the factory management agreed to a monthly increase of US\$5. Workers in other Rangoon factories have also announced they will demand wage increases.

Trade unions in Burma are banned and workers in Burma are denied their basic rights of assembly and collective bargaining.



Philippines call Burma elections a 'farce'

Philippines Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo has said that Burma's election will be "a farce" if Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League of Democracy, is unable to take part.

He predicted that the junta would likely prohibit Aung San Suu Kyi from running, as well others representatives of the National League of Democracy, which won the last election in 1990 but was never allowed to take power: "If this is so, then it's a mockery of Burma's own roadmap to democracy, such an election would be a farce."

The so-called "roadmap to democracy" was announced in 2003 in an attempt by the dictatorship to head off sanctions and other international pressure following an attempt to assassinate democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Fake elections due later this year are part of the roadmap, but the junta has not set a date yet.

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