



LAST MONTH IN BURMA

News from and about Burma

AUG
2009

Aung San Suu Kyi convicted

On 11 August 2009 Aung San Suu Kyi was found guilty of breaking the terms of her house arrest. She was sentenced to three years in prison with hard labour, but the sentence was immediately commuted to 18 months house arrest.

She was arrested on 14 May and put on trial after John Yettaw, an American citizen, swam across Inya Lake and refused to leave her house. Aung San Suu Kyi's two companions were also sentenced to 18 months house arrest. John Yettaw was sentenced to seven years in prison with hard labour but was released in August.

Aung San Suu Kyi's arrest and trial sparked outrage around the world. Protests demanding the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi were held around the world. World leaders, including Prime Minister Gordon Brown, President Obama, the UN and ASEAN all condemned the trial and sentence. After the verdict, Gordon Brown said: "I am both saddened and angry at the verdict today following the sham trial of Aung San Suu Kyi. This is a purely political sentence designed to prevent her from taking part in the regime's planned elections next year. So long as Aung San Suu Kyi and all those political opponents imprisoned in Burma remain in detention and are prevented from playing their full part in the political process, the planned elections in 2010 will have no credibility or legitimacy."



The Prime Minister also called on the UN Security Council to impose a worldwide ban on the sale of arms to the regime. The EU responded with additional targeted measures against the regime, including a visa ban on the four judges responsible for the verdict and an asset freeze on four SPDC-run media companies.

30,000 flee Burma Army attacks

In late August, the 20-year ceasefire agreement between the Kokang ethnic group and the SPDC Army broke down after regime forces moved to occupy Kokang territory. Nearly 37,000 refugees fled across the border into China.

China issued a rare warning to the SPDC to "maintain stability" along the China Burma border. The Chinese foreign ministry issued a statement that called on the SPDC to "properly handle domestic problems and maintain stability in the China-Burma border region." The statement also urged the SPDC "to protect the security and legal rights of Chinese citizens in Burma."

The three-day war between the Burma junta troops and the Kokang ceasefire ended on 29 August when Kokang troops fled to China and over 7,000 junta troops gained control of the Kokang Region. The cause of the conflict is linked to the Burmese regime's new constitution, which is designed to

entrench military rule and does not provide any democratic or ethnic rights. In preparations for its sham elections in 2010, the regime has been pressuring ethnic ceasefire groups to transform their armies into border guard forces under the control of the Burma Army. All of the major ceasefire groups have rejected these regime plans.

Democracy movement launches "Proposal for National Reconciliation"

The Movement for Democracy and Rights for Ethnic Nationalities, a coalition of all the major ethnic and pro-democracy organisations, has released their 'Proposal for National Reconciliation'. The paper sets out an alternative vision to the regime's sham roadmap process. The 'Proposal for National Reconciliation' calls for the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, a declaration of a nationwide ceasefire, a review of the SPDC's 2008 constitution, and a new or reformed electoral law ahead of the 2010 elections.

To subscribe to Last Month in Burma, simply send a blank email to:
lastmonth-subscribe@lists.burmacampaign.org.uk

The 'Proposal' acknowledges the right of the military to play a "significant role" during Burma's transition to democracy and calls for measures to transform military administration into civilian rule. The document also outlines a plan for socio-economic reforms to be implemented during the democratic transition.

The Movement for Democracy and Rights for Ethnic Nationalities includes National Coalition Government of Union of Burma (NCGUB), National Council of Union of Burma (NCUB), Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), Women's League of Burma (WLB), Students and Youth Congress of Burma (SYCB), Nationalities Youth Forum (NYF) and Forum for Democracy in Burma (FDB). The Proposal is available here: www.mdren.org/the-proposal.php

US Senator's visit to Burma sparks criticism

US Senator Jim Webb visited Burma in August, the first member of Congress to visit in more than a decade. He met Senior General Than Shwe, Burma's dictator, and Aung San Suu Kyi. Senator Webb also secured the release of the American John Yettaw, who was sentenced to seven years in prison after breaking into Aung San Suu Kyi's house.

Campaigners raised concerns that the regime was using Webb's visit for propaganda purposes and only allowed him such high level access because the Senator is opposed to sanctions and favours a softer line of engagement and economic investment in Burma.

Following Yettaw's release, a US State Department spokesman said it did not signify a policy change by the regime: "We'll be looking for signs that Burma's fundamentally changing its approach and its policies. I don't believe that Mr. Yettaw's release is an indication of that."

Rohingya teenagers die in Thai detention camp

Two Rohingya teenagers aged 19 and 15 died in a detention camp in southern Thailand, after refusing food and drink for several days, according to reports in the Thai newspaper The Nation. They were being

held with 55 other Rohingya asylum seekers at a detention camp near Thailand's southern border with Burma, after they were arrested on the Thai coast in January. The migrants have now been relocated to Bangkok.

The Thai government faced international condemnation in January after reports that Thai authorities forcibly expelled around 1000 Rohingya boat people, towing them out to sea and setting them adrift in boats without engines and with little food and water. An unknown number drowned, others were rescued off the coast of India and Indonesia.

The Rohingya are a mainly Muslim ethnic group in western Burma. They are subjected to systematic, persistent and widespread human rights violations by the ruling military regime. They are denied citizenship, are subject to constant extortion and land confiscation, do not have freedom of movement.

Australia backs global arms embargo against Burma

In August, the Australia Government expressed its support for a global arms embargo against Burma for the first time. Defence Minister John Faulkner said, "I can say that Australia supports these efforts to seek a UN Security Council mandated arms embargo on Burma. Australia agrees that arms should not be supplied to the Burmese regime, which of course has demonstrated its willingness to use force against the civilian population."

Burma Campaign Australia spokesperson Dr Myint Cho said, "The Australian Government today has taken a significant step in bringing around real change in Burma and helping the people of Burma realise their democratic aspirations."

On June 18th 2009 the Australian Senate unanimously passed a motion calling on the Australian Government to support a global arms embargo. Burma Campaign Australia has been running an online letter writing campaign calling on Australia's Foreign Minister to publicly support a global arms embargo.

**Published by The Burma Campaign UK, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT
www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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