

### **“Prepare for worst” says Aung San Suu Kyi**

Aung San Suu Kyi has expressed her frustration at the lack of any progress on political reform. After a rare meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders, spokesman Nyan Win reported that Aung San Suu Kyi was not satisfied with meetings with regime liaison officer Aung Kyi and the lack of any time frame. “Let’s hope for the best but prepare for the worst,” she said. Nyan Win also reported that she repeated her call for tripartite talks between the military, the NLD and ethnic leaders.



In continued defiance of the United Nations, the regime has stalled the return of UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari to the country. Gambari was due to return to the country in December, the regime delayed this until January and then announced a return would not be possible until mid-April.

On 18 January the UN Security Council issued a statement criticising the regime for its lack of progress, saying that they “regretted the slow rate of progress so far toward” meeting objectives they set out last October. In October, the Security Council adopted a non-binding statement calling for “the early release of all political prisoners and remaining detainees” and “for a genuine dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned parties and ethnic groups, in order to achieve an inclusive national reconciliation with the direct support of the United Nations.” After the meeting, US Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad told reporters that “in order for success to be achieved, we need to increase the pressure” on the military regime. China has also urged the regime to allow Gambari back soon to promote a genuine dialogue between the junta and opposition.

### **Army offensive in Eastern Burma creates growing humanitarian crisis**

Reports from Karen State in Eastern Burma say that the army’s offensive against the Karen is intensifying. Over the past two years the Burmese army has intensified a scorched earth campaign in Karen State, resulting in a growing humanitarian crisis.

Debbie Stothard, coordinator for the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, said “In the past two and a half years we have seen no let up in the attack, it’s an on-going intense offensive and that has meant that people – many, many communities – have not been able to grow rice for two years. 25,000 people are facing imminent starvation.”

Human rights groups say that the army often uses captured civilians as forced labor. Aid groups expect that in the coming months, thousands more Karen will be forced to flee and more lives will be lost.

### **Gems lose their shine for Junta**

Gems traders inside Burma and along the border areas have reported that the gems trade in Burma has slumped dramatically due to new sanctions, according to The Irrawaddy magazine. Human Rights Watch has also reported that “there are signs that international pressure has dampened the trade in Burma’s gems. The upcoming gem auction by the UMEH comes on the heels of the Myanmar Gems Emporium held in November 2007. Sales at that event did not meet expectations.” The group added that last November’s auction netted about 150 million dollars, well below Myanmar Gems Enterprise’s lowest sales projection of 230 million dollars.

Following the most recent state run gems fair the junta failed to report how much profit was made. In the past they rapidly published sales figures. The junta is now also holding gems fairs more regularly, possibly in an attempt to increase sales. The sale of gems internationally has been a vital lifeline for the ruling junta, bringing in millions of dollars every year.

The junta received around \$300 million from the sale of gems in 2006-07. Following the repression of the September uprising the US and the EU have enacted new sanctions prohibiting the import of Burmese gems.

### **400 children die every day in Burma**

A child dies every four minutes in Burma from preventable diseases. The new report by UNICEF says that up to 400 children die every day in Burma, the second-worst mortality rate for children in Asia after Afghanistan. In 2000, the World Health Organization ranked Burma's overall health care system as the world's second worst after Sierra Leone.



Tens of thousands of people in Burma die each year from malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, dysentery and other illnesses. The regime only spends about 3% on health annually, compared with at least 40% on the military, according to a report published by researchers from the University of California, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University.

### **Increased restrictions on aid organisations**

Burmese Ministry of Health officials summoned aid workers to the country's new capital, Naypyidaw, to issue new, more restrictive rules that the aid organisations must adhere to. Under the new rules all field trips must be accompanied by a "liaison officer" from the ministry and new restrictions were placed on data gathering. Aid organisations can now only gather data that relates to public health. This will further restrict the work of the thirty plus International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) that operate in Burma. The regime will not let the UN or other aid agencies deliver aid to large parts of Burma, mainly ethnic areas in the east and north of the country.

### **Douglas Alexander visits Thai/Burma border**

In January the International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander, travelled to the Thai-Burma border to meet Burmese refugees. He visited the Mae Lae refugee camp, home to 45,000 Burmese refugees. Speaking on the issue, Alexander said "The UK is doing more than ever to help support the Burmese people who are trying to live ordinary lives in extraordinary conditions until it's safe to return home."

The British Government announced in November that it would be doubling aid to Burma over the next three years, from £9 million to £18 million, in response to recommendations made by the Burma Campaign UK.

### **China continues to arm the Burmese military**

Mizzima news has reported that around 100 Chinese manufactured military trucks, built by the Chinese "First Automobile Works" (FAW), have been sighted at the China-Burma border, in preparation for delivery to the Burmese military. The trucks, which are worth approximately US\$9000, are part of a shipment of over 1,000 being donated by China to Burma. FAW, the manufacturer of the trucks, works in collaboration with Japan's Toyota Company and Germany's Volkswagen Company.

### **India signs Burma port deal**

India continues to prioritise business interests over human rights with the announcement in January that it is to rebuild the Sittwe port in Western Burma. The port refurbishment is part of a wider investment package that will improve the trade links of Eastern India by providing a new highway and navigable river from the Indian border to Sittwe port. The redevelopment of the port will increase revenue for the regime by facilitating trade and increasing tax revenues.

### **Brown raises Burma with China and India**

During recent visits to China and India, Prime Minister Gordon Brown called on both countries to do more on Burma. Brown said, "I believe that India as well as China have an important role to play in making sure that the end to violence happens in Burma." He added that he would like to see an early visit by UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, followed by a trip by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Burma. The Burma Campaign has long been calling for the Prime Minister to raise the issue of Burma with his counterparts in China and India but in the past Tony Blair never included Burma on the agenda.

### **President Arroyo rallies ASEAN to help free Aung San Suu Kyi**

In a rare move by a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued a stern message at the Davos summit, calling for Aung San Suu Kyi to be freed.

Arroyo stated "We must see political reform, We must see Aung San Suu Kyi released - and now." She warned that the Philippine Senate would not ratify the ASEAN Charter unless the legislators saw "real political reforms" take place in Burma.

## **Arrests continue – Junta cracks down on press**

Amnesty International reported in January that 1,850 political prisoners are today behind bars in Burma, this includes 96 that have been imprisoned since the junta promised the UN in November that it would stop arrests. Before the September 2007 uprising approximately 1,150 political prisoners were imprisoned. At present over 80 remain unaccounted for. In a related event the prominent poet, Saw Wai, was arrested for writing a poem, published in a weekly magazine, that contained a hidden message criticising junta leader Than Shwe. The first letters of each line spelt out “Power crazy senior general Than Shwe”. State censors are reportedly demanding that articles for publication are submitted one month ahead of publication, as opposed to the former one week deadline.

## **Bomb attacks in Burma**

A series of bomb attacks in January have resulted in three deaths and five people injured. On January 13, a bomb blast at a railway station in Rangoon injured one woman. Two days earlier, a bomb exploded in Pyu, a town north of Rangoon, killing one and injuring four others. The bomb blast in Pyu followed an explosion the same day at the railway station the new capital Naypyidaw, killing a 40-year-old woman. The last explosion occurred on January 16 on a bus near Rangoon. The driver was reportedly killed.

Whilst no group has claimed responsibility for the bombings, the ruling junta was quick to blame foreign “organisations”. Some observers have speculated that the small bombs were planted by the junta as a ploy to re-unite the army, which has reportedly suffered a rift between the high-ranking generals and lower ranks over the brutal repression of the peaceful protestors and monks last September. Other analysts suggest that the bombs were planned by the junta as a possible pretext for a further crackdown on democrats and any renewed protests.

## **88 Generation student leaders charged**

Many of the student leaders who were at the forefront of the 1988 uprising and involved in the September 2007 uprising have been under arrest without charge since the most recent protests. Two prominent leaders, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, and eight other activists have now been charged under section 17/20 of the Printers and Publishers Registration Law. The decision to press charges demonstrates that the regime is not serious about moving towards democratic transition or genuine engagement with the democracy movement.

## **Regime continues persecution of NLD**

Despite promising the UN to stop political arrests, the ruling junta has continued to harass members of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Currently 104 members of the NLD are imprisoned, many of whom have been tortured. NLD members were prevented from attending Independence Day celebrations in Pwintphyu township (Magwe division) and arrested for possessing documents detailing human rights violations. Kyin Maung, NLD chairman in Thada Oo Township, Mandalay division, was detained for donating rice to poor families and cautioned against further acts of charity. In other incidents 80 armed police prevented five NLD members from visiting their townships’ vice chairman’s house and the NLD member and blogger, Nay Phone Latt, was arrested in Rangoon. Despite this persecution, the NLD continued to organise activities including a celebration, attended by 600 people, of Burma’s anniversary day.

## **US, Britain, France make joint appeal on Burma**

On 24 January, Secretary of State David Miliband, Condoleezza Rice and Bernard Kouchner issued the following appeal at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Joint Statement on Burma by the UK, US and French Foreign Ministers at the World Economic Forum in Davos

The Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos is a unique event. No other occasion brings together so many of the world’s leaders from all fields. For over three decades now, these meetings have provided a global platform for collaboration and action to address international priorities of concern to us all.

One such priority is the urgent need for progress towards a transition to democracy and improved human rights in Burma. The fact that we have chosen to write about this issue, with so many competing priorities, should underline the strength of our governments’ determination to support the people of Burma in their pursuit of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic future. We have repeatedly made clear that the situation in Burma cannot continue, and that we remain committed to helping the people of Burma.

It is now more than four months since the world was horrified by the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Burma. The dramatic pictures seen around the world of the brutality directed against peaceful protestors, including monks and nuns, were truly shocking. We cannot afford to forget. We must convince the Burmese regime to

meet the demands of the international community and respect the basic rights of Burma's people. The UN Security Council in October spelled out its expectations and reiterated those expectations on January 17. First, the early release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the creation of conditions for a genuine dialogue between the Government and the opposition. Second, full co-operation and constructive engagement with the UN. Third, the need for the regime to address the economic, humanitarian and human rights concerns of the Burmese people. Several months on, however, we find the regime has met none of these demands.

The regime claims to be moving ahead with its roadmap to civilian rule. However the process, already 14 years old, is open-ended, and many key political actors, not least Aung San Suu Kyi, are excluded. There can be little doubt that only genuine and inclusive dialogue can deliver national reconciliation and stability for Burma and its neighbours. We call on all those attending the World Economic

Forum to demonstrate that, while the regime may be indifferent to the suffering of the Burmese people, the world is not.

We ask you to support the return to Burma by UN Special Adviser Gambari as soon as possible, and to urge the regime to cooperate fully with him and the UN. We call on the regime to act on the recommendations of UN Human Rights Envoy Pinheiro; to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi; and to launch a substantive, time-bound dialogue with democratic leaders and ethnic minority representatives, as called for in Aung San Suu Kyi's statement of November 8.

A unified call for genuine and peaceful political reconciliation and reform will be heard in Burma. We would not live up to our values if we ignored Burma's plight.

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[www.burmacampaign.org.uk](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk) tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



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