

### Pro-democracy campaigns intensify

During May activists intensified pro-democracy campaigns with public demonstrations and activities throughout Burma. The regime responded with a crackdown on peaceful demonstrations. According to The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, (AAPPB), in May alone, the regime arrested 99 democracy and human rights activists. 3 of the activists were imprisoned, 24 were released, and 74 are still being detained.

NLD members launched a 'Release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi' campaign on 1 May. The campaign, led by prominent activist and a NLD youth leader Su Su Nway, included a daily prayer campaign. However, Su Su Nway and around 30 other activists wearing 'Free Aung San Suu Kyi' T-shirts were arrested on 15 May as they



headed to pagodas around Rangoon to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Another 11 activists were arrested in Rangoon as they prepared to march to the Shwedagon Pagoda and the following day a further 15 pro-democracy activists were arrested in Rangoon. They were released after a few hours in detention.

In other events, a 62-year-old woman activist was arrested after staging a solo protest for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi in front of Rangoon's City Hall. Burma's Military Affairs Security detained about 30 people who were planning to attend a May Day workshop at the American Center in Rangoon.

The month of demonstrations concluded on 30 May as the NLD held ceremonies in Rangoon and Mandalay to mark the four-year anniversary of the Depayin massacre.

### Aung San Suu Kyi – global calls for release

Burma's military dictatorship defied calls from the NLD, UN, USA, EU and ASEAN to release Aung San Suu Kyi, instead extending her detention under house arrest on 25 May. The global appeal for her release included calls by the UN Secretary-General, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 14 UN Human Rights Rapporteurs, including Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, ASEAN, the European Union and 59 former Presidents and Prime Ministers.

China is becoming increasingly isolated in its defence of Burma's military regime and refused to join Southeast Asian nations urging Burma to release Aung San Suu Kyi. China called Suu Kyi's detention an "internal matter".

### HIV AIDS activists targeted

Following the arrest of HIV patient Tin Ko in April, another prominent AIDS activist, Phyu Phyu Thin, who is also an NLD member, was arrested on May 21. She ran a small clinic that provided free

antiretroviral treatment and accommodation to HIV-positive people. There are an estimated 360,000 people living with HIV in Burma.

### UN says Suu Kyi being detained illegally

On 31 May, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared Aung San Suu Kyi's detention in violation of international law. The Working Group stated: "The deprivation of liberty of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is arbitrary being in contravention of Articles 9, 10, and 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. . . The Working Group believes that under the circumstances the adequate remedy would be the immediate release of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi."

### Junta bans civil organizations

Burma's Ministry of Home Affairs has denied a license extension of 24 civil organizations, including the Free Funeral Services Society, two non-profit private hospitals, the Indian traders association and various Buddhist groups.

### **Militia's role in crackdown**

A Union Solidarity and Development Association official confirmed that Burma's Pyithu Swan Arr Shin militia has been mobilised against the democracy movement, according to the Democratic Voice of Burma. The USDA leader said that the Pyithu Swan Arr Shin and the USDA militia groups were preparing to arrest more Burmese activists, particularly those involved in prayer campaigns.

### **Burma among worst for Press Freedom**

On 1 May, World Press Freedom Day, Freedom House's annual survey ranked Burma as one of the worst places in the world for press freedom, beaten only by North Korea. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) also stated that Burma is among the worst-rated countries for press freedom.

### **Prime Minister Soe Win retires**

The regime's Prime Minister, Gen Soe Win, has stepped down, following reports that he is being treated for leukemia. Lt-Gen Thein Sein, considered one of Than Shwe's strongest supporters, is now 'acting Prime Minister'.

### **Russia to build nuclear reactor in Burma**

In a controversial deal announced in May, Russia has agreed to build a nuclear research centre in Burma. According to reports from Russia's nuclear power agency Rosatom, the facility will include a 10-megawatt nuclear reactor with low enriched uranium, a medical isotope production laboratory and nuclear waste treatment. The project will reportedly cost US \$540 million and take about five years to build. Russia will train 300-350 specialists for the centre.

### **North Korea concerns grow**

Concerns about the increasingly warm relation between two of the world's most brutal dictatorships continued to grow following another North Korean cargo ship stopping at Rangoon port claiming shelter from bad weather. Unconfirmed sources in Rangoon have said that North Korean cargo ships have been arriving in Rangoon for several years, some arriving at night, unloading, and leaving before dawn.

### **US to keep pushing on Security Council**

The new US Ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, has pledged that the US will continue to raise Burma at the Security Council. "Some of our friends in the UN Security Council do not share our approach," he said. "I will keep working on it."

### **UN envoy appointed – at last**



On May 22nd UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon finally appointed a new envoy to Burma. Although there was some disappointment that Ibrahim Gambari was again given responsibility as the envoy, (see LMIB April edition) hopes are now high that the envoy will help build international support for change in Burma, and will visit Burma again soon. In a welcome move, Gambari's mandate specifically refers to him working to help the regime implement UN General Assembly resolutions.

### **Chinese oil investors hit by worker disputes**

10 Burmese employees of China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has been questioned by authorities after protesting about low wages and long hours. CNOOC's operations in Arakan state have been the subject increasing hostility from local people as a result of bad working conditions and land confiscation.

### **Daewoo sends lawyers to Burma**

Daewoo, the South Korean company played the lead role in developing the Shwe gas fields in Burma, has reportedly sent a legal team to Burma to discuss reports that the regime has done a deal with China to exclusively export gas to the country. The deal to only export to China, and at a lower price than India or the open market would offer, it seen as a reward to China for vetoing a resolution on Burma at the United Nations Security Council.

### **National convention is a sham – USA**

America's top diplomat in Burma, Shari Villarosa, has condemned the regime's constitution drafting process as a 'sham' that will not bring democracy to the country. The guidelines in the new constitution enshrine military rule. Not one proposal by ethnic delegates to the convention has been accepted by the regime.

## **Senate Women's Caucus on Burma launched in USA**

All 16 women in the US Senate have joined a new caucus on Burma. Speaking at the launch of the Caucus, first lady Laura Bush said: "I want everyone to realize that these are Republican and Democratic senators, that this is a bipartisan issue and that all the women who signed this -- every single woman senator -- stand with all of our friends in Burma, including Aung San Suu Kyi."

## **New ILO representative in Burma**

Steven Marshall will take over from Richard Horsey as the new International Labour Organization's liaison officer in Rangoon.

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