

DFID doubles aid to Burma

The Secretary of State for International Development, Douglas Alexander MP, has announced that British aid to Burma will double from £8.8 million this year to £18 million by 2010. The Burma Campaign had condemned the Department for International Development's failure to take action on any of the key recommendations made by the International Development Committee, a cross-party committee of MPs which scrutinizes the work of DFID, and has been calling on DFID to implement the recommendations of the Committee.

"We are delighted that DFID is finally listening and recognizes the urgent need for more aid to Burma," said Zoya Phan, Campaigns Officer at the Burma Campaign UK. "However, this is just a first step. DFID now needs to implement all of the recommendations made by the International Development Committee, including funding for cross border aid, which is the only way to reach some of the most vulnerable people in Burma, and projects supporting human rights and democracy in Burma."

Arbitrary arrests 'continue unabated'

Following the brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters in September, the regime has continued to arrest and detain anyone suspected of supporting the uprising.

Amnesty International has condemned the new arrests of political activists in Burma, despite a commitment by Prime Minister Thein Sein to the UN Special envoy Ibrahim Gambari in early November that no more arrests would be carried out. "Two months after the violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators, arbitrary arrests continue unabated as part of the Myanmar government's systematic suppression of freedom of expression and association, contrary to its claims of a return to normalcy," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme Director. "Normalcy for the military government may mean a return to systematic and widespread human rights violations away from media attention, but the international community must no longer tolerate this situation," added Catherine Baber.

According to Amnesty International, to date, up to 700 people arrested during and since the September protests remain behind bars, while 1,150 political prisoners held prior to the protests have not been released.

Leading monk arrested

U Gambira, head of the All Burma Monks Alliance and a leading monk in the September protests in Burma, was arrested in Rangoon on 4 November, after spending a month in hiding. U Gambira has now been charged with treason by the Burmese junta and sentenced to life imprisonment. Two of his family members who had been previously detained as 'hostages' in an attempt to force him out of hiding, have been kept in detention.

Su Su Nway arrested

Prominent pro-democracy activist Su Su Nway was arrested on 13 November after putting up anti-junta posters. She was arrested while UN Human Rights Envoy Pinheiro's was visiting the country. Pinheiro was able to visit Su Su Nway in Insein Prison. However, when family



members went to the prison to see her, they were told by the prison authorities that she was not in Insein Prison. Her current whereabouts remain unknown.

88 Generation Students in Insein Prison

The military junta is reportedly preparing to give lengthy prison terms to members of the 88 Generation Students in detention. The regime launched a manhunt for the activists when the demonstrations first started in August and have arrested many of the leading members of the 88 Generation Students, including Ko Ko Gyi and Min Ko Naing. They are being held in Insein Prison and still being interrogated. They are now allowed to meet with their family members once a week and receive food and medicine from the family.

Women Activists demonstrate in Rangoon

On 25 November a group of more than 25 women activist marched through Rangoon to the Botataung pagoda, where they prayed for the monks and other protesters who died in the September uprising and for the release of detainees. The demonstration coincided with the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Exile-based women's rights groups say that 106 women, including six nuns, are being held in custody in Rangoon after being arrested in connection with September's demonstrations. Although security remains tight in Rangoon, further small displays of opposition are still occurring, such as anti-regime leaflets being distributed and slogans spray-painted on walls.

Burma named 'Child Soldier Capital of the World'

A major report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has labelled Burma the "Child soldier capital of the world". The report states that 70,000 children are enlisted as soldiers in Burma. Since 2002 the UN Secretary General has issued five reports on child soldiers in Burma condemning Burma's national army, the Tatmadaw, for violating international law that prohibits the use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch has called the Burmese regime's response to this situation "wholly insufficient" and has called on the UN to impose an embargo on Burma to end the use of child soldiers.

Famous actor barred from working

Kyaw Thu, one of the most famous actors in Burma, has been unable to work since his release. He supported the monks during the uprising by providing food and medicine to the protesting monks and encouraged other celebrities to join in the protests. He and his wife were arrested in October and released after three days of interrogation. Magazines are now afraid to publish his name and movie directors are reluctant to continue working with him as the work will be banned by the junta's censorship board.

Maggin Monastery forced to close

A monastery that provided care for HIV/AIDS patients has been forced to close by the regime. The Maggin monastery is a prominent monastery in Rangoon and played a leading role in the September uprising. Several of the monks, including the Abbot of the monastery (pictured), are still in detention. Authorities gave less than 24 hours notice before forcing the monastery to close. At the time of closure two senior monks, six novices who are orphans, two monastery assistants and a number of HIV/AIDS patients were living at the monastery.



Regime continues its 'roadmap to democracy'

Than Shwe, Burma's dictator, has vowed that the only path to political reform is via the junta's own 'roadmap to democracy'. The process has been widely dismissed as a blueprint for entrenching military rule. A drafting commission of 54 people handpicked by the military has now been appointed and will hold their first meeting on 1st December. There has been no indication of how long they will take to complete their work.

UN envoy fails again

UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari left Burma for a second time since the crackdown having failed to reach a breakthrough. Gambari met Aung San Suu Kyi at a government guesthouse in Rangoon but no details of their meeting have been made public. However, he failed to secure a meeting with Senior General Than Shwe. The regime rejected his bid for three-way talks with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Burma needs priority attention from ASEAN

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro made a five-day visit to Burma in November. Following the visit he confirmed that he found no improvements in the human rights situation and reiterated concerns over the harsh detention conditions faced by political prisoners.

He also called on ASEAN to do more, saying that Burma's human rights situation is still urgent and deserves priority attention from ASEAN leaders. "It is my sincere hope that the critical situation in Myanmar receives serious consideration at the ASEAN Summit," said Prof. Pinheiro.

ASEAN signs new Charter

During their summit in Singapore, ASEAN signed their first charter, which commits members to promote human rights and democracy, but provides no mechanism for punishing those who do not adhere to the charter's principles.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo said her government was pleased that the charter called on member nations to respect human rights and democracy, but remained "concerned that the forces of authoritarianism still move rather slowly toward democracy in Myanmar."

She said that by signing the charter Burma would be committing itself to restoring democracy and releasing Aung San Suu Kyi. "Those who will sign the charter agree to the objective, spirit and intent of establishing a human rights body - the full protection of human rights within Asean," she warned. "Until the Philippine Congress sees that happen, it would have extreme difficulty in ratifying the Asean charter," she added.

Indonesia also called on Burma to respect the new ASEAN Charter. An Indonesian presidential spokesman said that "The countries who sign this charter are expected to uphold and apply the values mentioned in the charter, including Myanmar ... this contains advanced values for ASEAN, including democracy, human rights and openness."

ASEAN cancels Gambari's briefing on Burma

In a diplomatic embarrassment for ASEAN, Southeast Asian leaders cancelled a briefing by UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari on the crisis in Burma after the junta objected. Thein Sein "made clear that the situation in Myanmar was a domestic Myanmar thing and that Myanmar was fully capable of handling the situation by itself," summit host Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong told a press conference.

EU threatens to block ASEAN free trade deal

During negotiations in the Philippines over an EU-ASEAN free trade area, the EU strongly criticised ASEAN members for their stance over Burma. The EU warned that inaction over Burma would hamper any chance of an EU-ASEAN free trade area. During the visit, the EU delegation stated that Burma erodes the credibility of the Asian grouping, restated the call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and stated that the EU sanctions would continue indefinitely.

EU appoints Special Envoy to Burma

Piero Fassino, an MP and former Italian Minister of Justice, has been appointed EU Special Envoy to Burma. "The office will last a few months, possibly six," an official of EU High Representative Javier Solana said. Fassino "is assigned the task of supporting EU and UN efforts to bring about political changes in Burma".

UN Resolution on Burma

The UN Human Rights Committee approved a resolution on 20 November strongly condemning the regime's crackdown on peaceful protesters and calling on the military junta to immediately release political prisoners. The resolution also calls on the junta to cooperate UN special adviser Ibrahim Gambari. The vote was 88-24 with 66 abstentions. India was among the countries that voted against

the resolution. The resolution is expected to be endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December.

Canada announces new sanctions

Canada's Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier announced further sanctions against the regime in November, saying "there is no more room for compromise with this odious regime ... The regime in Burma is abhorrent to Canadian values (and) we are going to impose the toughest sanctions in the world."

The new sanctions include a ban on Canadian investment, trade, the provision of Canadian financial services and the transfer of technical data to Burma. The measures also include the freezing of the Canadian assets of Burmese citizens connected with the junta. In October, Canada granted honorary citizenship to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Daewoo officials convicted of Burma arms deals

On November 15, two Daewoo International executives and twelve other South Koreans were found guilty of arms exports to Burma between 2002 and 2006 under a US\$133 million deal. Korean law prohibits the unauthorized export of strategic materials to Burma.

Despite the guilty verdict, the Daewoo executives were given only lenient sentences. Taeyoung Lee, former Daewoo International President, was given a US\$10,000 fine and its former Managing Director given a one-year suspended sentence.

Daewoo International invests in Burmese oil and gas projects. It is also the main operator of the Shwe natural gas project in western Burma, projected to generate the regime US\$12-17 billion over the next 20 years.

European pension funds withdraw from Total Oil

The campaign against Total's investment in Burma has intensified since the September uprising. In November European pension funds withdrew almost £110m in investments from French oil company Total in a matter of days in protest at the company's involvement in Burma.

The boycott is being led by pension funds in Denmark, which acted after Danish foreign affairs minister Per Stig Moller called for European Union sanctions on investment into the country.

On November 24th, a UK wide day of action against Total was held with protests outside 36 Total garages across the country.



French President Nicolas Sarkozy has stated that he would support the idea of parliamentary inquiry into French oil giant Total's operations in Burma. The idea was raised during a meeting with writers and intellectuals in November. "He told us that he would support that idea," said Bernard-Henri Levy, one of the intellectuals at the meeting. In late September Sarkozy urged French businesses including Total to freeze their investments in Burma.

Burma – Asia's gas giant

Burma's hydrocarbon exports continue to grow; it now ranks as 11th largest gas exporter worldwide and is the largest exporter of gas in Asia. The revenue from the exports provides vital foreign exchange (gas exports in 2006-7 equalled \$2.03 billion) for the military dictatorship. The regime began exporting gas via a pipeline to Thailand in the late 1990s. The Junta works with 13 companies from Australia, Britain, Canada, China, Indonesia, India, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Russia to enable it to exploit the country's oil and gas reserves.

China backs dialogue between Burma and Aung San Suu Kyi

On November 20th China's premier Wen Jiabao encouraged Burma to continue dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. Wen Jiabao said "China as a neighbour is very concerned about Myanmar

and hopes that all sides can increase dialogue and find a resolution to the current crisis. China hopes that it is the Myanmar people who will decide Myanmar's future and that the international community can offer constructive advice".

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao also confirmed that China "had played and would continue to play a constructive role on the Myanmar issue." Liu added that "China will continue to support the mediation efforts of the UN Secretary General and Mr Gambari ... We sincerely hope Myanmar achieve stability, development, democracy and reconciliation."

Singapore Foreign Minister in India to discuss Burma

Singapore's Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo met with the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee, to review the situation in Burma. George Yeo said: "I think all of us in the region share a common interest in there being a peaceful transition to democracy in Myanmar one which involves genuine national reconciliation, which means the involvement of Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD and the various ethnic groups in the country, and the recognition that the military must be a part of the solution."

Vietnam opposes Burma sanctions

During special envoy Gambari's visit to Vietnam, Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem stated that "Vietnam was willing to take part in solving issues of mutual concern, and continue to co-ordinate in dealing with the Myanmar issue." However, he stressed that "As a former victim of embargoes and blockade policies, Viet Nam would not support any on Myanmar and respected the Myanmar people's right to self-determination." Vietnam joins the UN Security Council as anon-permanent member in January 2008.

Burma sells \$150 million of gems at auction

During November's gem auction, the regime sold precious stones worth \$150 million. However, the estimated sales reached only half of the junta's goal of \$300 million. The regime used to hold gem auctions twice a year but has been holding them with increasing frequency in a bid to raise much-needed foreign currency. It held four auctions in 2006.

The European Union introduced a ban on the import of gems from Burma in October and the United States, which has banned the import of gems from Burma since 2003, closed a loophole in existing legislation in November, and has now banned the import of Burmese gems via third countries.

According to reports from the Kachin News Group, Te Za, the regime's closest business crony and President of Htoo Trading Company, has taken control of almost all the Phakant jade mines in Kachin State. Now jade mining companies must buy jade mining blocks from Te Za's company rather than directly from Burma's Ministry of Mines.

Brown proposes Burma recovery plan

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has proposed an economic recovery plan for Burma if there is demonstrable and irrevocable progress towards reconciliation and democracy.

A statement by the Foreign Office states, "At the same time as applying pressure on the regime, we have been clear that if a genuine political transformation gets under way, the international community should begin the work which will lead to substantial economic support for a new, democratic government of Burma."

Burma Campaign has welcomed proposals for a development package. Mark Farmaner, Acting Director at the Burma Campaign UK said, "It is essential to have a development package ready to be implemented as soon as there is genuine change in Burma. Decades of corruption, economic mismanagement, and the diversion of resources into military infrastructure, rather than spending on health, education, and economic development, have left Burmese people in terrible poverty. Waiting until after reform before starting this process will be too late. We would, however, also like to caution against any economic development package being implemented before there is genuine change in Burma."

UN official expelled from Burma

A day before UN Envoy Ibrahim Gambari's arrival in Burma, the regime announced that they would not renew the mandate of Charles Petrie, UN Country Coordinator in Burma and

the UN's most senior official in the country. Charles Petrie was told of the decision after being summoned to the new capital Naypyidaw for a meeting with junta officials.

The decision followed the release of a UN country team statement on October 24, 2007 to mark United Nations Day. The UN statement did not even mention, let alone criticize, the violent crackdown on the protests, but noted that the dire state of the economy is a result of government policies and appealed to the government to increase its public spending in social sectors and for a significant scaling up of international assistance to Burma's poor.

The decision to expel Petrie shows the military regime's intolerance for even the mildest criticism.

Burma Justice Committee petitions UN

On 15 November, The Burma Justice Committee was launched in the House of Lords. Tim Dutton QC, a founding member of the Committee, said "Legal help is vital to those who are being made to suffer at the hands of the military forces and their henchmen in Burma. There has been a spontaneous response from lawyers from around the world to the initiative which has led to the creation of the Burma Justice Committee."

The Burma Justice Committee was formed in the wake of the military crackdown in Burma to fight against human rights violations in Burma. The Committee has now presented petitions to the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, on behalf of three Burmese currently detained by the Junta.

Aung San Suu Kyi meets NLD executive

On 9 November Aung San Suu Kyi had a meeting with colleagues from the leadership of the National League for Democracy party. It was the first time they had been in contact with her for more than three years. NLD spokesman Nyan Win said Suu Kyi looked "fit, well and energetic like before. She is full of ideas."

He said she told her fellow party leaders that the regime's crackdown on September's demonstrations was "devastating for the NLD, the government and the people," and that a healing process such as the release of

political prisoners is essential. She also told her colleagues that she will ask for two liaison officers of her choice to help her communicate with them.

UN special envoy Gambari also met with Aung San Suu Kyi and released the following statement on her behalf after leaving the country:

- I wish to thank all those who have stood by my side all this time, both inside and outside my country. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his unwavering support for the cause of national reconciliation, democracy and human rights in my country.

- I welcome the appointment on 8 October of Minister Aung Kyi as Minister for Relations. Our first meeting on 25 October was constructive and I look forward to further regular discussions. I expect that this phase of preliminary consultations will conclude soon so that a meaningful and timebound dialogue with the SPDC leadership can start as early as possible.

- In the interest of the nation, I stand ready to cooperate with the Government in order to make this process of dialogue a success and welcome the necessary good offices role of the United Nations to help facilitate our efforts in this regard.

- In full awareness of the essential role of political parties in democratic societies, in deep appreciation of the sacrifices of the members of my party and in my position as General Secretary, I will be guided by the policies and wishes of the National League for Democracy. However, in this time of vital need for democratic solidarity and national unity, it is my duty to give constant and serious considerations to the interests and opinions of as broad a range of political organizations and forces as possible, in particular those of our ethnic nationality races.

- To that end, I am committed to pursue the path of dialogue constructively and invite the Government and all relevant parties to join me in this spirit.

- I believe that stability, prosperity and democracy for my country, living at peace with itself and with full respect for human rights, offers the best prospect for my country to fully contribute to the development and stability of the region in close partnership with its neighbors and fellow ASEAN members, and to play a positive role as a respected member of the international community.

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AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**