



LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT

A summary of Burma-related issues in the British Parliament and Europe

APRIL
2008

COMMONS WRITTEN ANSWERS

Foreign and Commonwealth office

Thailand: Burma

1 April

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the policies of the Government of Thailand in regard to Burma; what discussions he has had with the Government of Thailand on Burma; and what reports he has received to the statements made by the Prime Minister of Thailand during, and following, his recent visit to Burma.*
[196397]

Meg Munn: *I discussed issues relating to Burma with the Thai Foreign Minister, Noppadon Pattama, on 29 February 2008 during my recent visit to Thailand and again on 11 March, before he visited Burma. Foreign Minister Noppadon assured me that the new Thai Government want to become more actively engaged on Burma as part of a wider "Neighbourhood Engagement Policy".*

The Thai Government support the good offices mission of the UN Secretary-General to promote peaceful reconciliation in Burma. We noted the warm welcome Thai Prime Minister Samak received during his recent visit to Burma. We believe it is important that the Thai Government should send a clear message on the need for political transformation in Burma. We encourage Prime Minister Samak and other members of the Thai Government to reinforce this message in their contacts with their Burmese counterparts.

We continue to discuss all aspects of the Burma situation with the Thai Government on a regular basis.

Home Department

Asylum

3 April

Mr. Clappison: *To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to the answer of 11 March 2008, Official Report, columns 336-7W, on asylum, if she will give a break down by nationality of the other nationalities granted leave to remain under the 2003 family indefinite leave to remain exercise.*

Mr. Byrne [holding answer 18 March 2008]: *The requested information is contained in the following table*

Copies of asylum statistics publications are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics website at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html>.

Grants of ILR issued under the Family ILR exercise as at 7 December 2007, excluding dependants, for specified nationalities(1, 2, 3, 4)

Myanmar (Burma)

10

Department for International Development

Burma: Famine

3 April

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with (a) the World Food Programme and (b) other UN bodies on a potential famine in Chin state, western Burma.*

Mr. Douglas Alexander: *I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) on 25 March 2008, Official Report, column 34W.*

Burma: Overseas Aid

21 April

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to investigate means of providing (a) in-country and (b) cross-border assistance to Chin state, western Burma.*

Mr. Malik: *The Department for International Development (DFID) is already providing a significant amount of support to Chin State from inside the country. This includes support to livelihoods and community development activities through the United Nations Development Programme in every Township in Chin State; and support through the Three Diseases Fund for work on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. In addition we have regular discussions with Chin civil society groups about conditions in Chin State, and the prospects for provision of additional support.*

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Burma: Refugees

22 April

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the (a) UN High Commissioner for Refugees and (b) government of (i) India and (ii) Bangladesh on the potential numbers of people migrating from Chin state, western Burma as a result of famine and human rights violations;*

John Bercow: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (2) what reports he has received of famine in Chin state, western Burma; what steps he has taken to investigate such reports; and what steps he plans to take in the event of such reports being confirmed.*

Meg Munn: *I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield the (Mr. Mitchell) on 25 March 2008, Official Report, column 34W.*

We are aware that in parts of Chin state, as well as neighbouring areas in India and Bangladesh, people are experiencing significant hardship due to rodent infestations and consequent crop damage. The Department for International Development (DFID) is in contact with the UN Development Programme and World Food Programme about what humanitarian response may be required. DFID already provides a significant amount of support to Chin state from inside Burma. We also closely monitor the human rights situation in Burma, including abuses committed against ethnic groups.

We have received no reports of any recent upsurge in levels of migration across Indian and Bangladeshi borders from Chin state and as a result have not discussed the issue with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or Indian and Bangladeshi governments. We do, however, discuss conditions in Burma generally and the plight of refugees from Burma with neighbouring countries.

Home Department

Entry Clearance: Employment

23 April

Mr. Clappison: *To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to the answer of 14 January 2008, Official Report, column 1048W, on entry clearances: employment, if she will give a breakdown by nationality of those receiving leave to (a) enter and (b) remain under the International Graduate Scheme. [181145]*

Mr. Byrne: *The information is provided in the following tables:*

(a) Leave to enter in Table A

The difference in total from that previously indicated is that the figures provided are up to 31 December 2007.

(b) Leave to remain in Table B

The figures quoted are not provided under National Statistics protocols and have been derived from local management information and are therefore provisional and subject to change.

Table A, Leave to Enter:

Burma – one or two

Table B, Leave to Remain:

Burma – 30

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Burma: Internally Displaced Persons

28 April

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to mitigate the challenges arising from the volume of internally displaced people in Karenni state and other parts of eastern Burma; and which of these have been taken in co-operation with the government of Thailand.

Meg Munn: I visited Thailand from 28 February to 1 March and met several non-governmental organisations working in the refugee camps on the Burma/Thailand border. I also raised the plight of ethnic groups in the border region with the Thai Minister of Interior.

The UK provides support to people in Karenni state through several mechanisms:

funding for the UN Development Programme's Human Development Initiative;

our significant contribution to the Three Diseases Fund, which supports work on HIV? tuberculosis and malaria in Karenni state;

support provided through local faith based organisations who are able to reach internally displaced people from inside the country; and

support from Thailand through the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, which is providing assistance to the refugee camp bordering Karenni state, Ban Mae Noi Sae.

UK funding for projects in Karenni state is part of our effort to provide humanitarian assistance to people suffering poverty and deprivation across Burma. The Department for International Development's programme in Burma is increasing from £9 million in 2007-08 to £18 million in 2010-11.

Burma: Politics and Government

28 April

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to invoke the UN Security Council principle of the responsibility to protect in relation to Burma.

Meg Munn: We continue to support the concept of Responsibility to Protect, under which governments have the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

As a member of the UN Security Council the UK has persistently stated that the military regime in Burma must account for the systematic and appalling human rights abuses it commits against Burma's people. We strongly support the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma and his work to gather evidence of the abuses that have taken place. We have called for his early return to Burma to be facilitated by the regime to enable the Rapporteur to continue his vital role.

The UK has helped to secure strong resolutions on Burma at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee, and worked to keep Burma on the Security Council agenda. The President of the UN Security Council's statement in October 2007 required a number of actions by the regime, including an inclusive transition to democracy. With the Burmese military rulers' failure to deliver any tangible outcomes despite the good work by the office of the UN Secretary-General, we will continue to consider options for further Security Council action with like-minded partners in New York.

Burma: Constitutions

29 April

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessments he has made of the likelihood that the planned referendum on the Burmese draft constitution will be free and fair; and if he will make a statement.

Meg Munn: The Burmese regime's referendum on their new constitution, set for 10 May 2008, is being conducted in an atmosphere of harassment and intimidation. Criticism of the process and the draft constitution is punishable by long prison sentences. The regime has excluded opposition figures and representatives of ethnic groups in Burma from participating in the process and denies the "No" campaign a platform to air its arguments. The referendum seeks to perpetuate the role of the military in the government of the country. The constitution as drafted specifically targets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, disqualifying her from office for having a foreign spouse. Members of religious orders will also be disenfranchised.

We endorse the view of UN Special Rapporteur on human rights, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, who commented on 14 March:

"No referendum or elections can be fair, no transition to democracy can be effective, without the release of political prisoners, the authorisation for all political parties to operate, and the protection of the basic civil and political freedoms, all non-existent in Myanmar".

Department for International Development

Burma: Ethnic Groups

29 April

John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to (a) provide humanitarian assistance to internally-displaced people and (b) alleviate the humanitarian situation in Karenni state.

Mr. Malik: The Department for International Development (DFID) funds humanitarian assistance to people in Karenni state through:

the UN Development Programme's Human Development Initiative to improve the livelihoods of poor families in rural areas;

the Three Diseases Fund which supports the work of CARE, World Vision, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation in fighting HIV, TB and malaria in Karenni State;

the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) which allocates part of its funding to assistance for internally displaced people inside Karenni State; and

local faith based organisations which are able to reach internally displaced people in Karenni state from inside Burma.

DFID funding for TBBC is also used to provide assistance for people from Karenni state who are living as refugees in Thailand.

DEBATES IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

EU: General Affairs and External Relations Council

25 April

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Malloch-Brown): *My honourable friend the Minister for Europe (Jim Murphy) has made the following Written Ministerial Statement.*

The General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) will be held on 29 April in Luxembourg. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary (David Miliband) will represent the UK.

The agenda items are as follows:

External Relations

Burma

The council is expected to renew the EU's strengthened common position imposing restrictive measures against Burma. The Government strongly support the common position and will want conclusions on Burma, to highlight deep flaws in the regime's plans for a referendum and new constitution entrenching military rule. The Government believe the council should also take this opportunity to confirm that work is under way on possible reinforcement of the EU's restrictive measures, so that the council can respond quickly to developments.

LORDS WRITTEN ANSWERS

Infant Mortality

3 April

Lord Alton of Liverpool asked Her Majesty's Government:

What are the levels of infant mortality and the amounts received in aid per capita from (a) the United Kingdom, and (b) the European Commission in each of Vietnam; Cambodia; Bangladesh; Philippines; North Korea; and Burma.

Baroness Crawley: Details on infant mortality rates for 2006, and the amount of official development assistance (ODA) provided by the EC and the UK to each country in calendar year 2006 are laid out in the table below:

Table 1: Infant Mortality Rates and Total and Per Capita EC and UK ODA, by Country, 2006.

Burma

Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births) 74

Population (millions) 51.0

EC ODA (£ millions) 6.0

EC ODA Per Capita (£) 0.12

UK ODA (£ millions) 0.12

UK ODA Per Capita (£) 7.3

Sources: UNICEF (Infant Mortality Rates), World Bank (Population), DAC (EC ODA).

SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

DOCUMENTS CLEARED FROM SCRUTINY, AWAITING OUTCOME OF CORRESPONDENCE WITH MINISTERS

House of Lords - European Union - Eighth Report

4 April

(08) 4 Council Regulation renewing and strengthening current restrictive measures in respect of Burma and repealing Regulation (EC) No 817/2006 (FCO)

Sifted 5 February 2008 Letter to the Government 19 Feb 08 - Cleared from Scrutiny at meeting on 7 Feb 08 Letter to the Chairman 6 Mar 08

House of Commons - European Scrutiny - Twenty-First Report

23 April

Documents cleared

9 FCO Restrictive measures against the regime in Burma

Council Common Position renewing current restrictive measures in respect of Burma

Legal base Article 15 EU; unanimity

Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Basis of consideration EM of 17 April 2008

Previous Committee Report None; but see (29368) 5401/08: HC 16-xi (2007-08), chapter 9 (6 February 2008) and (29083) —: HC 16-ii (2007-08), chapter 21 (14 November 2007)

To be discussed in Council 29 April General Affairs and External Relations Council

Committee's assessment Politically important

Committee's decision Cleared; but further information requested.

Background

9.1 *Starting with Common Position 1996/635/CFSP, the EU has adapted and strengthened its sanctions regime against Burma over the last ten years in response to deteriorating circumstances on the ground, failure by the government of Burma to make progress on human rights and national reconciliation, and the use of forced labour. In line with EU sanctions policy the EU has worked to achieve positive change in Burma by placing pressure on those responsible for its policies, whilst minimising any adverse impact on the general population.*

9.2 *In 2006, the EU again revised its Common Position via CP 2006/340/CFSP, by imposing the following measures:*

— *a visa ban and assets freeze against named members of the military regime, the military and security forces, the military regime's economic interests and other individuals, groups, undertakings or entities associated with the military regime and their families.*

— *a visa ban against serving members of the military of the rank of Brigadier-General and above.*

— *a comprehensive embargo on arms and equipment that might be used for internal repression and ban on military personnel being attached to diplomatic representations in and from Burma.*

— *a ban on high-level bilateral government visits at the level of Political Director and above.*

— *a suspension of most non-humanitarian aid.*

— *prohibition on EU companies making finance available to, or extension of participation in, named Burmese state-owned companies, their joint ventures and subsidiaries.*

9.3 *In view of the deterioration of the situation in Burma, the EU adopted Common Position 2007/750/CFSP on 19 November 2007 (which we cleared at our meeting on 14 November 2007). This provided for new restrictive measures concerning certain imports from, exports to and investments in Burma/Myanmar, targeting its timber and extractive industries, which provide sources of revenue for the military regime. It also broadened the scope of the existing restrictions on investment by applying them also in respect of investment in enterprises owned or controlled by persons or entities associated with the military regime, and broadened the categories of persons targeted by the freezing of funds and economic resources.[29]*

9.4 *Then, on 6 February 2008, we cleared a revised Council Regulation which:*

* *extended the current restrictive measures which provide sources of revenue for the military regime of Burma/Myanmar in respect of:*

— *extending and updating persons subject to a travel ban;*

— *the freezing of their assets;*

— *extending and updating the list of enterprises in Burma subject to an investment ban.*

* *proposed additional restrictive measures:*

— *an export ban on the industrial sectors of logs and timber and defined metals, minerals, precious and semiprecious stones; to include diamonds, rubies, sapphires, jade and emeralds (the Regulation will now*

include finished products with an exemption for personal items of jewellery);

— an import ban on products from the above mentioned sectors;

— an investment ban on new trade in the above mentioned sectors;

— the provision of technical assistance or training related to relevant equipment and technology destined for enterprises in the above industries in Burma/Myanmar.

The further Common Position

9.5 The proposed Common Position renews current restrictive measures which provide sources of revenue for the military regime of Burma for a further 12 months and amends the Annexes in respect of:

— updating persons subject to a travel ban (with the inclusion of members of the judiciary) who are responsible for implementing acts of repression by the regime and;

— the freezing of their assets; and

— updating the list of enterprises in Burma subject to an investment ban by adding a further 30 names to the list.

The Government's view

9.6 In his 17 April 2008 Explanatory Memorandum, the Minister for Europe at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Jim Murphy) recalls that the Council agreed the new restrictive measures in November to increase direct pressure on the Burmese regime following their violent suppression of peaceful protestors as well as the continued human rights abuses in Burma and detention of over 1,100 political prisoners.

9.7 He says that it is consistent with previous EU policy, given the current political and human rights situation in Burma, "to increase pressure on the military regime to enter into a meaningful and genuine dialogue with the democratic opposition". The ultimate aim, he again says, is the eventual transition to civilian rule and full respect of human rights, including the release of political prisoners and recognition of the rights of ethnic communities.

9.8 He agrees that the restrictive measures should be extended for a further 12 months:

"... in view of the lack of improvement of the human rights situation in Burma or the lack of substantive progress towards an inclusive democratisation process, notwithstanding the announcement of the Government of Burma that a referendum on a new constitution would be held in May 2008 and that multi-party elections would be held in 2010. The Burmese military have failed to meet the demands of the international community and continue to violate human rights, including by continuing to detain and sentence democracy campaigners. The UK strongly supports the renewal of this position as it binds 27 Member States to a robust policy in support of political change in Burma."

9.9 He expects the draft Common Position to be approved at the 29 April 2008 General Affairs and External Relations Council .

Conclusions

9.10 Although we have no concern over these proposals, we are reporting them to the House because of the widespread interest in the situation in Burma.

9.11 We also recall our request, in previous reports on this topic and in correspondence with the Minister, for him to explain more of the background thinking to these longstanding sanctions measures, which would appear to have had little effect on a brutal and inflexible regime. We have asked whom the Minister has consulted in the formulation of UK policy. We have asked what else the EU and the UK have been

seeking to do, over and above this sanctions package, and what other ideas have been in play. Now, the Minister says, the Burmese regime “have failed to meet the demands of the international community”. That international community includes China, a permanent member of the Security Council with immense influence over the regime. We are not aware of the Chinese authorities participating in these demands. We therefore ask what representations have been made to them by the Secretary General/High Representative, or at the most recent EU-China summit, the agenda of which included “a broad range of bilateral, regional and international issues including Burma/Myanmar”. We also ask if representations have been made by recent senior Government visitors.[30]

9.12 We now clear the document, but would be grateful if the Minister would write to us with regard to these wider aspects of the EU’s and the UK’s response to the regime’s continuing intransigence.

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Council Conclusions on Burma/Myanmar 2865th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting

Luxembourg, 29 April 2008

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

“1. The European Union continues to be deeply concerned by the situation in Burma/Myanmar and again urges the authorities to take rapid steps for transition to a legitimate, civilian government and for national reconciliation.

2. The Council notes the report by UN Special Adviser on Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, on the absence of any immediate, tangible results of his recent visit to Burma/Myanmar. The EU reiterates its full support for the Good Offices Mission of the UN Secretary General and calls on partners, in particular the neighbours of Burma/Myanmar, to do likewise.

3. The Council commends the work of EU Special Envoy Piero Fassino in support of UN efforts and in co-ordinating with Asian partners. The EU will intensify its close consultations with ASEAN members and other neighbours of Burma/Myanmar, including those that are represented in the UN Security Council.

4. The Council remains convinced that only a process that involves the full participation of all stakeholders in the country, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic groups, will lead to national reconciliation and stability. Thus the Council believes the draft constitution, referendum and elections, as currently conceived, will not address the many problems facing Burma/Myanmar.

5. The Council calls on the authorities to allow a free and open debate by all political actors on the constitution prior to the referendum on 10 May, and to rescind the laws prohibiting criticism of the National Convention and the referendum. The EU calls on the authorities to guarantee that the referendum will be free and fair as well as to invite international monitoring. The Council urges the authorities to ensure the political process is transparent, and to give the people of Burma/Myanmar clarity about the future political process and the 2010 elections.

6. The Council expresses concern that the draft constitution would foresee restrictions on the eligibility for high political office, allow the military to suspend the constitution at will as well as fail to accommodate the country’s ethnic diversity.

7. The Council reiterates its call for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and deplores the intensified intimidation and violence in the run-up to the referendum. The Council reiterates its call for the authorities to co-operate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, and implement his recommendations.

8. The Council notes today’s adoption of the Common Position, renewing for a further twelve months restrictive measures targeted against those responsible for human rights abuses and lack of development

in Burma/Myanmar. Recalling the Council Conclusions of 15 October 2007, the Council reiterates its readiness to review or amend these measures or to introduce further restrictive measures in light of developments on the ground.

9. The Council recalls that as part of its restrictive measures against Burma/Myanmar the sales, supply, transfer or export of arms and related material of all types are prohibited. The Council would like to encourage the international community to adopt similar measures. 10. The EU recalls its unwavering, strong commitment to the welfare of the people of Burma/Myanmar. The EU and its Member States provide substantial assistance to their country. The EU continues to stand ready to respond positively to genuine progress towards democracy by engaging with Burma/Myanmar in its development and by finding new areas of cooperation.”

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**CAMPAIGNING
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
AND DEMOCRACY IN BURMA**