

10. Freedom of Opinion, Expression and the Press

10.1 Background

Following the practice of previous military administrations, the SLORC/SPDC has clamped down heavily on the freedom of expression of the people of Burma. Not only is there a wide comprehensive censorship of the media, much of which is state-controlled, but all expression of views or opinions critical of the SLORC are usually visited with swift and concise punishment under one or more of the broadly -worded criminal laws.

The SPDC continues to arrest, detain, convict or imprison many persons for peacefully expressing or attempting to express political opinions critical of the military and its rule, or for possessing or distributing publications in which such opinions are expressed. The strict control in turn encourages self-censorship on the part of writers and publishers.

The SPDC operates one of the most strict and severe censorship regimes, which has really stunted the country's political, social and economic development over the years. The abuses range from censorship of the media, books, song lyrics, and movies, and restrictions on computer use to the harassment of political opponents of military rule.

All forms of domestic public media are officially controlled or censored by the SPDC. The SPDC continues to own and control all daily newspapers, domestic radio and television broadcasting facilities. These official media remain propaganda organs of the SPDC and normally do not report opposing views except to criticize them. The only English-language newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar*, is a long litany of the doings of the country's leaders, not forgetting venom-filled attacks on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party. In November 1999 General Khin Nyunt, one of the junta's strongmen, made the front pages of the government newspapers after telling a political rally that "internal traitors must be eliminated", making special mention of journalists who supported democracy.

The SPDC also continues to restrict the legal importation of foreign new periodicals, as of all other goods, by licensing. Citizens are generally unable to subscribe directly to foreign publications, but a limited selection of foreign newspapers can be purchased in a few hotels and stores in Rangoon. Censors frequently banned issues or deleted articles deemed unwelcome by the SPDC. Since 1998, the SPDC has ordered publishers of weekly journals to include articles attacking Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Each journal has to include at least one article. People caught reading underground newspapers are severely punished.

News agencies are only allowed to employ Burmese reporters. Foreign journalists who apply for a press visa have to promise to interview a member of the junta. Any who enter Burma on a tourist visa are liable to be thrown out of the country and may be harshly interrogated. Deemed guilty of "illegal investigation", they are thereafter banned from returning to Burma.

10.2 SPDC's laws restricting freedom of expression

The main instrument of censorship is the *Printers and Publishers Registration Law of 1962* under which all books, magazines, periodicals, songs and films are vetted by a Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) prior to publication or distribution. The Board has powers to restrict not only the contents of materials submitted for scrutiny, but also the number of copies that may be legally published and distributed. Its decisions may not be contested through the courts and are reviewable only by the Minister of Home Affairs, whose decision is final. In 1975, the BSPP government, presumably in an attempt to lessen the uncertainties inherent in the system, issued a set of guidelines. These set out the broad parameters of censorship followed by the PSB. According to these guidelines, the following materials would not be tolerated:

- (a) anything detrimental to the Burmese Socialist Program;
- (b) anything detrimental to the ideology of the state;
- (c) anything detrimental to the socialist economy;
- (d) anything which might be harmful to national solidarity and unity;
- (e) anything which might be harmful to security, the rule of law, peace and public order;
- (f) any incorrect idea and opinions which do not accord with the times;
- (g) any descriptions which, though factually correct, are unsuitable because of the time or circumstances of their writing;
- (h) any obscene (pornographic) writing;
- (i) any writing which would encourage crimes and unnatural cruelty and violence;
- (j) any criticisms on non-constructive type of the work of government departments;
- (k) any libel or slander of any individuals.

Under the law, individual writers who are seen as critical of the government can be blacklisted. A breach of the law can lead to imprisonment for up to seven years and/or fines of up to 30,000 *kyat*. The law, which is introduced soon after the military coup of 1962, has been amended several times, usually to widen its scope and/or increase its severity, most recently in 1989.

Another law which has been frequently used by the SPDC to stifle freedom of expression is the *Official Secrets Act 1923*, a pre-independence law which has been jettisoned even in its country of origin in favor of more liberal legislation. Under this Act, it is an offence, among other things, to possess, control, receive or communicate any document or information, the disclosure of which is likely to affect the sovereignty and integrity of the state or friendly relations with foreign states or otherwise be prejudicial to the safety of the state. It has been used against people who have passed on documents not so classified and which cannot reasonably be argued to be a threat to the national interest. The authorities enjoy an almost open-ended power to classify official information as 'secret' under the Act, and no exception is made whatsoever for the disclosure of classified information on public interest grounds. Anyone convicted of an offence is liable to be punished with imprisonment for up to two years, or with a fine, or both.

Emergency Provisions Act (1950) has been one of the most heavily used laws over the past half century. Those currently or previously imprisoned under it include opposition politicians, monks and other clerics, students, writers, and trade unionists. Despite not being

a law exclusive aimed at suppressing freedom of expression, it has frequently been invoked towards that end, usually in conjunction with other media-directed law such as the Printers and Publishers Registration Law and the Official Secret Act.

This law confers sweeping powers on the authorities to silence and punish any act of real or perceived dissent, even in the absence of a proclaimed state of emergency. This law makes it an offence, punishable with imprisonment for up to seven years, to commit any act which “violates or infringes upon the integrity, health, conduct and respect of State military organizations and government employees towards the ... government”, or “causes or intends to spread false news about the government”, or “causes or intends to disrupt the morality or the behavior of a group of people or the general public.” A more sweeping provision in the law renders any act which is “intended to cause, or causes, sabotage or hinders the successful functioning of the State military organization and criminal investigative organizations” liable to be punished with death or life imprisonment. Similar punishment is prescribed for “collecting and divulging, or intending to divulge, information to people involved in treason against the State, on the movements, the strength, the location, the guidelines and regional defense strategies of the State military organizations and criminal investigative organizations who are engaged in preserving the stability of the State. This act is silent on procedural matters. It does not indicate whether anyone convicted under its provisions can appeal to a higher court against conviction and sentence, nor does it make any provision for the granting of bail pending trial or sentence.

State Protection law (1975), also known as the “Law to Safeguard the State from the Dangers of Destructive Elements” allows the government to declare a state of emergency in a part or the whole of Burma “with a view to protect state sovereignty and security and public law and order from danger”, and to restrict any fundamental rights of the citizens in specified regions or all over the country. Although any state of emergency declared under this law has to be approved by the People’s Assembly within 60 days, it can be extended indefinitely by the Assembly. This law gives the authorities sweeping power: anyone who is suspected of having committed, or who is committing, or who is about to commit, any act which “endangers the sovereignty and security of the state or public peace and tranquillity”, can be imprisoned for up to five years without trial on the orders of the executive. These power are in practice exercised by a cabinet committee chaired by the Home and Religious Affairs Minister and including the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, as amended by Law 11/91, dated August 9, 1991. This amendment was made applicable retroactively, so that prisoners suffering detention prior to its enactment could also be subjected to the enhanced punishment. This law also allows the executive to pass restriction orders under which anyone can be confined to a specific area or have their freedom of movement otherwise restrained, or be prohibited from possessing or using specified articles. No order passed under this law can be the subject of an appeal to any court, although appeals are allowed to be made to the Union Cabinet. The law also contains provisions for periodic reviews of detention or restriction orders to be carried out by the executive. In 1994, the SPDC announced that, according to advice received from their legal advisors, they would be justified in holding anyone arrested under the State Protection law for a total of six years, arguing that the period of five years specified in Section 14 was in addition to the period of one year initially allowed under the section- an interpretation which has been criticized by human rights monitors. This state protection law has been applied extensively to suppress peaceful political dissidents; it was

used to detain Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest between July 1989 and July 1995.

A new law entitled ***“Protection of the Stable, Peaceful, and Systematical Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Implementation of National Convention Task, Free from Disruption and Opposition”*** was issued on June 7, 1996. Its makes offence to instigate, protest, say, write or distribute anything which would “disrupt and deteriorate the stability of the state, communal peace and tranquility, and the prevalence of law and order”, or “affect and destroy the national consolidation”, or “affect, destroy and belittle he tasks being implemented at the National Convention. . . . and cause misunderstanding among the people.” The law also forbids anyone from drawing up or writing or distributing a Constitution for the country without legal authorization, and also makes any attempts at collaboration in any of the above-mentioned acts an offence. All offences are punishable with imprisonment, which may range from three months to twenty years, and possibly a fine. Organizations found guilty of any of the offences risk being banned or disbanded, and their properties confiscated. This law has been seen by many observers as being targeted specifically at the NLD and its supporters to counter the growing supports for the party and its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The law’s sweeping provisions are clearly designed to stifle all dissent.

“The Television and Video Act” issued ion July 31, 1996, is another law whose addition to the statute book has had a considerable adverse impact on the state of freedom of expression in Burma. Though aimed ostensibly to:

- (a) modernize and uplift the standard of the video business,
 - (b) cause the emergence of video tapes which will b beneficial for the all-round development of the State and the preservation of Myanmar cultural heritage;
 - (c) cause the emergence of video tapes which will contribute towards national solidarity and dynamism of patriotic spirit;
 - (d) prohibit and band decadent video tapes which will undermine Myanmar culture and Myanmar tradition; and
 - (e) control and prevent malpractice which are caused through video business,
- this law, in practice, further restricted freedom of expression in the country.

It provide for compulsory licensing of television sets, video cassette recorder and satellite television by the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs, and of the video business by newly-constituted State or Division Video Business Supervisory Committee. The latter has been brought within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information, but the role of determining the conditions to be imposed on licenses has been allocated to the State-run Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise. A Video Business Supervisory Committee, composing government officials and representatives of the public, has been entrusted with the task of supervising the State and Divisional Committees, including “finding that any order or decision made by (them) is not in conformity with the law.” The State and Divisional Committee have been given responsibility for deciding on the grant of video business licenses and for inspecting and supervising video businesses within their territorial jurisdictions. A provision has been made for constituting District or Township Video Business Supervisory Committees where the State or Divisional Committee considers it necessary. The law also provides for mandatory censorship of all video tapes, whether locally produced or imported, by a Video Censor Board composed of government officials and representatives of the public. In deciding censorship applications, the Board has three options:

- (a) to permit unrestricted exhibition of the video tape to the public or for a family show;
- (b) to prohibit the public exhibition of the tape and to order its seizure or destruction; or
- (c) to permit exhibition of the tape after excisions, amendments or erasures are made of matter deemed unsuitable for public viewing.”

The law makes it compulsory for every video tape prohibited within Burma to include the censorship certificate and for that certificate to be shown at every screening of the tape. The Censor Board has been empowered to re-inspect any video tape which it has previously certified for public exhibition, and to revoke any certificate issued by it “if there is valid reason to do so”.

The law lays down stiff penalties for non-compliance with its provision. Operation of a television transmission business without permission from the government is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years or an unspecified fine, and may render the property which relates ‘directly to the offence’ liable to confiscation. A number of other offences, such as: operating a video business for commercial purposes with a license; copying, distributing, hiring or exhibiting a video tape in disregard of directions from the Censor Board to make excisions, amendments or erasures; exhibiting to general public an imported video tape which is certified by the Censor Board as suitable only for family showing, are made punishable with imprisonment for up to three years or with a fine of up to 100,000 *kyat*, or both, as are the offenses of ; distributing, hiring or exhibiting, for commercial purposes, copies of any television program transmitted by the government; and copying, hiring, distributing or exhibiting of commercial purposes any video tape without the permission of its owner or license-holder.

Concurrently, the SPDC has launched a crackdown on hundreds of video shops through the country and forced many of them to close, after discovering that home-made video tapes of NLD rallies and of Western reports on Burma were distributed through them. The authorities have also blocked public access to foreign satellite television broadcasts by setting license fees at an exorbitantly high level, effectively restricting access to the wealthy and ruling elite.

In 1998, the SPDC issued new rule requiring the licensing of all video cassette recorders and imposing new control on the export and transport of video tapes. The revisions to the Television and Video law of July 1996 also required new licenses for all satellite receivers. Opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly sent video tape messages from Rangoon on such occasions as International Human Rights Days. It is not clear whether the revised law would criminalize such actions.

Another law entitled “*The Computer Science Development Law*”, issued on September 27, 1996, makes the unauthorized import, possession, and use of certain types of computer equipment illegal. This has been the subject of universal and strong condemnation by human rights monitors in recent years. This law requires anyone who wishes to import, possess or use computer equipment, notably those with networking or communication facility, to obtain a license from the Ministry of Communications, Post and Telegraphs. It also requires those desirous of “setting up a computer network or connecting a link inside the computer network” to apply for prior sanction to that Ministry. The Ministry is granted absolute power to grant or refuse licenses and sanctions and to impose such conditions as it may deem fit. Failure to obtain a license or sanction is made punishable with imprisonment for between seven and 15 years and with an unspecified fine.

The law also makes it an offence to use a computer network “or any information technology” for the following purposes;

- (a) carrying out any act which undermine State security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquility, national unity, state economy or national culture.
- (b) obtaining or sending and distributing any information or State secret relevant to State security, prevalence of law and order and community peace and tranquility, national unity, State economy or national culture.”

This offense is also punishable with imprisonment for between seven and fifteen years and with an unlimited fine, as is the offense of importing or exporting any type of computer software prescribed by the Myanmar Computer Science Development Council, a state-appointed body entrusted with wide-ranging powers to implement the provisions of the law.

10.3 First privately owned English newspaper in Burma

In February 2000, the first privately owned English newspaper was allowed in Burma. The weekly paper, ‘The Myanmar’s Times’, run by editor-in-chief Ross Dunkley, is a tabloid, printed in four colors, on high-quality imported paper. The new tabloid is owned by a joint venture between local and foreign partners, called Myanmar Consolidated Media Co Ltd. The paper is priced at US \$2-a hefty sum by Burma standards when compared with 35 *Kyat* for other journals and newspaper now in circulation with government approval.

10.4 Restrictions on foreign journalists

SPDC rarely issues visas for journalists. Nowadays, these visas only seem to be available if the journalist is known to be pro-SPDC or if he or she is writing about business and/or military issues. Consequently, the only other way for journalists to enter Burma is under cover of a tourist visa. The SPDC describes this activity as “illegally gathering news”, and if discovered, journalists are usually deported and banned from ever returning to Burma. The SPDC announced in March 1999 that foreign journalists and anyone else working with the media had to obtain special permission from the Burmese embassy in their country before going to Rangoon. Anyone arrested in Burma without such permission would be immediately expelled.

10.5 Internet access in Burma

The Ministry of Defense continues to operate the country’s only known internet server but it was only for a select few business owners who are friendly with the military. In July 1999 there was an Internet training workshop in Rangoon, organized by the World Trade Organization, and attended by military intelligence, staff from the foreign affairs and commerce ministries. Since then the regime has been talking up the wonders of information technology. Its leader, Gen Khin Nyunt, told a symposium last October: “Information technology has become an indispensable tool in our daily life . . . Myanmar is fully aware of the importance of information technology in nation-building.”

Diplomats at a few foreign embassies also acknowledged that they have Net access and email, despite the SPDC's restriction. Even then, they say their email is intercepted and read by the SPDC authorities.

In 1999 it began to offer Internet services selectively to a small number of customers. The new regulations, issued in mid-January 1999, forbade "any writings detrimental to the interests of the Union of Myanmar, and any writings related to politics. " Web pages can only be created with state permission, and Internet account holders are responsible for ensuring no-one else uses their account.

In December, 1999, SPDC announced that it would be the sole provider of Internet services in Burma. On December 18, six people including Col. Khin Maung Lwin, the computer officer at the War Office in Rangoon and five instructors from Eagle Computer School and Winner Computer School were arrested for violating the "Official Secrets Act." The schools were closed and the teachers were instructed to tell students that they were closing due to "Y2K problems." According to the opposition media, the 6 men were arrested for, "the proliferation in Rangoon of reports carried by the opposition web page, 'BurmaNet'". At the beginning of February, Eagle IT was allowed to reopen for one week to allow customers to get their 42,000 incoming email messages that had piled up on Eagle's servers since the December closure. The only catch was customers had to come in person to Eagle's office—and bring a floppy disk. (*Source: Burmanet*)

10.6 Arrest and death of journalists

Twenty-seven employees from the 'Kyemon' newspaper were interrogated in September 1999 for describing Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt as the world-famous crook. Two people died in the course of the interrogation. The September 25 issue of 'Kyemon' carried a picture and a report about Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt meeting the chairman of the Burma Council of Churches. Above the picture of Lt-Gen. Khin Nyunt was the caption: "The World Famous Crook." Soon after the release of the newspaper, military intelligence agents came and conducted interrogations, leading to 'Kyemon' newspaper employee, U Hla Han's death on September 27 and another employee, U Tha Win's death on October 2. The bodies of the two were cremated immediately after their deaths and their family members were allowed to view the bodies for only a few minutes. According to some close relatives, they had bruises on their faces. The SPDC authorities were reported to have given only 10,000 *kyat* for their funeral expenses. The military intelligence threatened the family members not to disclose the incident. Due to much discontent among the 'Kyemon' staff members, 20 of the persons who had been detained were released. However, seven are still being detained.

10.7 List of journalists and artists in detention

Name	Prison	Comment
1. Maung Wan Tha (a) U Soe Thein	Insein	Celebrated Burmese writer
2. Htun Zaw Htay (a) Ko Htay Lwin	Myingyan	Writer and poetry critic

HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 1999-2000: BURMA

Name	Prison	Comment
3. Myint Myat Thein (a) U Myint Thein	Thayet	Article writer
4. U Win Tin	Insein	Famous Burmese journalist who worked as an editor of Hantarwaddy Newspaper
5. San San Nwe (a) Daw San San	Insein	Famous writer
6. Aung Zin Min (a) U Min Zin	Tharawaddy	Writer and poet
7. Thu Yein Htet Lin (a) Ye Htut (a) Yan Naung Soe	Myawn Mya	Notable writer
8. Nyein Thit (a) Ko Thaung Htun	Insein	Poet
9. Maung Aung Pwint (a) U Aung Pwint	Insein	Famous poet and editor for Padauk Pwint Thit Magazine. Also a journalist for MV media group
10. Maung Thwe Ni (a) Ko Mya Kyaing	Tharawaddy	Poet
11. Ko Thet Zaw	Insein	Editor for a Burmese Magazine
12. Myo Myint Nyein	Tharawaddy	Prominent editor for MaHayThi Magazine
13. Maung Ngwe Oo (a) U Sein Hla Oo.	Myint Kyi Nar	Editor of a well-known Newspaper
14. Aung Wint (a) U Ohn Kyaing parliamentary period	Taung Ngu	A journalist since the 1950's
15. Cho Seint (a) Kyaw San	Tharawaddy	Poet (Grandson of Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, noted poet of the anti- colonial struggle)
16. Tin Maung Kyi	Tharawaddy	Poet and Magazine graphics designer
17. Kyi Tin Oo	Insein	Writer
18. Maung Hmaing Lwin (a) U Tin Aye Kyu.	Mandalay	Poet
19. Maung Tin Thit (a) Ko Yin Mon	Mandalay	Poet
20. Maung Nan Wai- Bamaw (a) Ko Yan Naing Min	Mandalay	Poet
21. Aung Khin Sint (a) Dr. Aung Khin Sint	Insein	Writer and physician

Name	Prison	Comment
22. Maung Thein Nyunt-Kaut Ka Yake	Ye-Mon detention center	Writer
23. Aung Htun	Tharawaddy	Writer of Burmese Student History

(Source: ABFSU)

U Win Tin

U Win Tin, the former editor of *Hanthawaddy*, is one of Burma's most respected journalists and intellectuals. He was arrested on 4 July 1989 and sentenced in October of that year to three years' hard labor. The sentence was later reported to have been extended to 11 years, then reduced to ten under the terms of an amnesty announced in January 1993. He is still at Insein jail. Aged 69, he is frequently interrogated by the MIS but has always refused to condemn the opposition parliament in exile - which the junta has set as a condition of his release. His health worsened considerably in 1999 and he is believed to be suffering from an inflammatory infection of the spine. He was arrested because of his political work for the NLD. In particular, the government accused him of urging the party to adopt civil disobedience as a way of resisting martial law. Officially, U Win Tin was convicted of "harbouring a criminal wanted for arrest" under article 216 of the penal code. The "criminal" in question was thought to be a young woman who had had an abortion, which is illegal in Burma.

San San Nweh

San San Nweh, winner of the 1999 Reporters Sans Frontières - Fondation de France prize, has been a journalist for 30 years and was joint editor of several women's magazines before her arrest in 1994 at the same time as her elder daughter. San San Nweh was sentenced to ten years in prison. The authorities accused her in particular of talking to two French journalists in April 1993. According to recent reports, she is still being held at Insein jail and has spent several months in the prison hospital. Now 55 and weakened by bouts of malaria, she is said to be suffering from liver disease and eyesight problems. Since the death of her husband, also a journalist, her mother has been her only source of support. People who have tried to send her food or money have been threatened by the MIS, and the publisher of one of her books was recently detained for a month because he had helped her financially.

U Sein Hla Oo

U Sein Hla Oo, a journalist with the daily *Bothtaung* and a well-known short story writer, was arrested in 1994 and is currently serving a 14-year sentence for translating Aung San Suu Kyi's book "Freedom from Fear" into Burmese. He is being held at Myitkyina prison, in the north of the country. Until August his wife was allowed to see him every three months but those visits have now been banned. Aged 61, U Sein Hla Oo is thought to be suffering from heart disease and was recently admitted to the prison hospital.

Myo Myint Nyein and Sein Hlaing

Freelance journalists Myo Myint Nyein and Sein Hlaing worked mainly for cultural magazines. They were arrested together in September 1990 and sentenced to seven years in jail for publishing an “antigovernment propaganda” leaflet entitled “What has become of us?” In November 1995 they were sentenced to a further seven years after books were found in their cell at Insein prison. Myo Myint Nyein has been moved to Tharrawaddy prison and is reported to be in good health. Sein Hlaing is still at Insein, where his family has not been allowed to visit him since August 1999.

U Moe Thu

U Moe Thu is a reporter for the economic magazine Dana as well as a well-known author. He was arrested in May 1996 under the terms of article 10 (a) of the 1975 State Protection Law, which means that he can be kept in prison indefinitely without trial. Aged 60, he is currently being held at Insein jail and is said to be suffering from stomach and heart disease.

Sonny (Khin Maung Win)

Sonny (Khin Maung Win), a 40-year-old photographer and cameraman working for the NLD, was arrested in June 1997 for filming an interview with Aung San Suu Kyi which was shown at the ASEAN summit in Bangkok. He was sentenced to seven years in jail in August 1997 for “knowingly publishing false information”. He is believed to be detained at Myitkyina jail, in the north of the country, although the prison authorities recently told his family that he was no longer on their list of inmates. No-one has seen him for several months.

U Tha Ban

U Tha Ban, a journalist with the daily Kyemon (The Mirror), was arrested in March 1997 and sentenced to seven years in prison for helping a student leader to publish a book. Aged 65, he is being held at Insein jail. He is reported to have difficulty walking and to be suffering from eye problems. His family’s request that he be examined by an ophthalmologist was rejected by the authorities.

U Soe Thein (Maung Wontha)

U Soe Thein (Maung Wontha), a journalist with the daily Botahtaung, was arrested in May 1996 under article 10 (a) of the 1975 State Protection Law. He is being held at Insein prison and is reported to be suffering from high blood pressure.

Ohn Kyaing

Ohn Kyaing, a journalist working for the dailies Kyemon and Hanthawaddy under the pen name of Aung Wint, was arrested in August 1990 and has been sentenced to a total of 17 years’ imprisonment. He is currently held at Taungoo jail, 120 miles north of Rangoon. A member of the NLD executive committee, he was elected to parliament in 1990. His arrest came after he spoke out against the bloody repression of demonstrations by students and Buddhist monks in Mandalay. On 17 October he was sentenced to seven years in jail for “writing and distributing seditious pamphlets” and “writing an antigovernment article”. On

15 May 1991 he was sentenced to another ten years under article 5 of the emergency law. His family has been forced to sell their house and land in order to help him.

Aung Zin Min

Aung Zin Min, a journalist with the magazine *New Style*, was sentenced to seven years in jail in 1996 for publishing articles supporting democracy. Aged 60, he is currently held at Tharrawaddy prison.

U Thein Tan

U Thein Tan, 60, a journalist with *Kyemon* and *Hanthawaddy*, was arrested in 1990 and sentenced to a total of ten years in prison. According to some sources, his health has worsened recently.

Cho Seint

Freelance journalist Cho Seint was arrested in 1996 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment because of his commitment to democracy. He is in Tharrawaddy prison.

U Tin Maung Kyi

Some sources maintain that U Tin Maung Kyi, a freelance journalist and contributor to the magazine *Moewai*, was arrested in July 1996. He was reportedly sentenced to seven years' imprisonment that year, and a further ten years in 1997.

10.8 Journalists Released

Two journalists were released from Burmese jails in 1999. Myat Hlaing of the magazine *Payfulwa*, who is also a poet and NLD Member of Parliament, was arrested in December 1991. He was initially given a ten-year sentence, which was later extended to 15 years without his family being given any explanation. He was freed from Tharrawaddy prison in November. Freelance Mau Thwe Khaing was released at the same time. He had been arrested in 1996 and given a 14-year sentence. He too had been campaigning for democracy.

10.9 Journalists arrested

Independent sources said that on September 25, 1999 members of the secret service went to the editorial offices of the government daily '*Kyemon*'. That morning the newspaper had published a photo of one of the junta's strongmen, General Khin Nyunt, alongside the headline "The world's most famous crook". At least seven employees of the newspaper, including some journalists, were taken to a police station and interrogated about the reasons for the "mistake". One is believed to have died under torture (see "Journalists killed" section). They were all released eventually but were dismissed from their jobs. A representative of the junta said when questioned by foreign journalists that the juxtaposition of the photo and headline had been an "unintentional error", and that the journalist had died in an alcohol-induced coma.