

# **KAOWAO NEWS NO. 134**

**Newsletter for social justice and freedom in Burma**

**October 6 - 19, 2007**

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## **Readers' Front**

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to serve better the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. Additionally, we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. We reserve the

right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,  
Editor  
Kaowao News  
kaowao@hotmail.com, www.kaowao.org

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Dear Editor

What is the stand of the NMSP towards the National Convention (NC) held by the regime? The NMSP stopped sending its representative to the regime's NC after a letter it signed with 12 other ethnic cease-fire groups was ignored and all Mons form all works of life supporting its decision not to participate in the NC.

However it is astonishingly since the NMSP joined the junta's rally in support of the outcome of the NC. I do not understand this action.

In fact, no matter what the stand of NMSP on the NC, it does show a fully supportive action by sending its members to the rally. I also would like to know if the decision to send members to the rally was due to the strong pressure by the regime – in a similar way to which they forced compulsory attendance by the public.

In my personal point of view, it is not the event to send the delegates to observe or what so ever.

With Mitta  
Will (Canberra, Australia)

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*On Insurgent-planted mines killed 2, injured 2 in Ye*

I'm not sure if Kaowao did it intentionally, it is acting as the SPDC's sub media.

LM (non-partisan)  
Vancouver, Canada

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### **Traveling Monks Face Difficulties**

Kaowao: October 19, 2007

Since being forced to return their hometowns by SPDC forces many monks around the country have found it very difficult to move freely, as police search and interrogate them thoroughly at each check point.

This has led to complaints from vendors in charge of cars and trains, as the interrogations are problematic both for monks and other passengers; they cause conflict and delay trips. Monks from Mon state and Pa-An township of Karen State have found travel outside their hometowns near impossible.

According to one monk from Lamine Township, Mon State, “Last week when I came to Moulmein, I was asked a lot of questions by checkpoint police, so I think now that car drivers are not willing to take the monks in their vehicles. Whenever a monk travels in their car they have to clarify questions and are investigated by checkpoint police.”

“After the monks finished their studies in Mawlamyine they obtained traveling documents from their abbots. However, when they crossed the Thanbyu Zayat checkpoint, police questioned them, threatened them and forced them to go back to their home town,” he added.

Another monk told Kaowao that, “After the monk led demonstration, the SPDC marked us all as their enemies so when monks traveling by car now the police are looking at us as their enemies. They can threaten us and make things very difficult, but they cannot ask for money from us.”

In Ye Township; government authorities ordered every monastery to cease any guest monk accommodation. One monk who was fleeing to Ye Township was without shelter initially, but was able to track down his donor and sleep one night there.

“Most of the Mon monasteries in Ye Township dare not allow monks to sleep in their monasteries now, so when night falls monks have to go to their donor’s house and sleep there,” said the monk.

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## **Myanmar embassies receiving 'Panties for Peace'**

The Associated Press: Oct. 19, 2007 7

BANGKOK, Thailand -- Women in several countries have begun sending their panties to Myanmar embassies in a culturally insulting gesture of protest against the recent brutal crackdown there, a campaign supporter said Friday.

"It's an extremely strong message in Burmese and in all Southeast Asian culture," said Liz Hilton, who supports an activist group that launched the "Panties for Peace" drive earlier this week.

The group, Lanna Action for Burma, says the country's superstitious generals, especially junta leader Gen. Than Shwe, also believe that contact with women's underwear saps them of power.

To widespread international condemnation, the military in Myanmar, also known as Burma, crushed mass anti-regime demonstrations recently and continues to hunt down and imprison those who took part.

Hilton said women in Thailand, Australia, Singapore, England and other European countries have started sending or delivering their underwear to Myanmar missions following informal coordination among activist organizations and individuals.

"You can post, deliver or fling your panties at the closest Burmese Embassy any day from today. Send early, send often!" the Lanna Action for Burma website urges.

"So far we have had no response from Burmese officials," Hilton said.

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## **Drug dealer set free by Burma Army Major**

Kaowao; October 18, 2007

Though arrested by both Thai and Burmese police, a Three Pagodas Pass based Major of the Burma Army today released a known drug dealer after just two days behind bars.

The drug dealer was released by a specific order from Major Hla Oo from the Burmese Infantry Battalion No.308, based in Three Pagodas Pass, according to a Thai police spokesman.

Min Htay Win (29) from Ye Town, Mon State was arrested by a joint force of Thai and Burmese police officers on October 12 as part of a major crackdown on the booming narcotics trade in the area. Townspeople were shocked at seeing Win walk free after such a short stint in detention.

"They (Burmese authorities) failed to punish the drug dealer and allowed him to walk free. This type of action or inaction makes it really difficult to control the narcotics trade," said a source from the town's police.

Also on October 12, the Thai Army seized 10,000 amphetamines from a student aged 12 from the Thai side of the Three Pagodas border town and 160 amphetamines from a woman based in Sanghklaburi village.

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### **Thai Police arrest Mon Drug Dealer**

Kaowao; October 15, 2007

Three Pagodas Pass - Last Friday Thai Police arrested a Mon man accused of selling narcotics around the Three Pagodas Pass area. Drugs were seized during the arrest.

On October 12, Thai Police began a crackdown on the drug trade around the Three Pagodas Pass area, apprehending many individuals and collecting almost 8000 amphetamines.

"As of October 12 at 10 am Thai Police had collected 7920 measures of narcotics enabling them to today begin their undercover operations, posing as narcotics dealers. This led to the arrest of one person," said Nai Wi Ra from the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

He added, "In this case the NMSP was assisting the Thai Police in their investigations. One Ye villager, Min Htay Win, was arrested."

There were also suspected drug dealers operating in Hto Mai gate near the Taing Ta Yar Monastery.

“Unfortunately the drugs trade, including amphetamines and marijuana, has spread dramatically through the Three Pagodas Pass area,” said one Three Pagodas Pass villager.

“Currently narcotic numbers are increasing in Three Pagodas Pass again, although most drug users use ganja more than narcotics, because it comes from nearby villages," he told Kaowao.

The prevailing view of Three Pagodas Pass residents, endorsed by a village leader from the area, is that the Three Pagodas Pass authorities are not currently taking any significant action to prevent narcotics or other drugs being exported to Three Pagodas Pass. This lack of action then contributes significantly to the high number of drugs being sold and used in the border town.

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### **Guest house bomb attack in Myawaddy**

Kaowao; October 13, 2007

A bomb exploded inside an ethnic minority-run guest house in the border town of Myawaddy at about 3 pm on October 12th, wounding two people. Initial investigations suggest the explosive was planted in the hotel, although investigators have yet to state who they suspect.

The explosion occurred in the first floor, in room number eleven at the Shwe-Pyi-San-Yar guest house. This four-story residence is located close to the Myanmar-Thailand Friendship Bridge, which links the two countries.

Although reports are conflicting, it is believed between two and five people were injured, including one elderly man.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no link between the guest house owner and the New Mon State Party (NMSP), said a committee member of the NMSP working in the economic department in Myawaddy.

"Nai Myint Aung, owner of the guest house, is not a member of NMSP. Only rumours have linked us," Nai Seik Rot from the NMSP office in Myawaddy said.

The guest house has been open for twelve months.

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## **NMSP denied giving a speech to support mass rally**

Kaowao: October 11, 2007

In Moulmein; the New Mon State Party denied giving a rally supporting speech on the stage, a leader of the New Mon State Party said.

Last week SPDC authorities asked a leading member of the NMSP for a three minute speech supporting a rally. The NMSP, however, denied the request.

Nonetheless, the NMSP attended the SPDC National Convention for observation purposes and it sent five members to attend the mass rally as observers. “The government authorities first requested that we don’t have to speak but just attend as listeners, so we send five members to join the rally” said a senior leader of the cease-fire party.

Yesterday, the government authorities celebrated NC supporting rally in Moulmein and the NMSP sent some members to observe. Other cease-fire groups also attended the celebration but couldn’t confirm yet which groups joined in.

Every cease-fire group has to attend the rally, so whilst the SPDC holds conventions in the ethnic states, cease-fire groups such as KIO, DKBA and Phado Aung San of Karen group support the rallies by giving speeches.

Meanwhile, the Kachin Students Association complained about the KIO attending the rally in Myint Kyi Nar, Kachin State.

The state control media has released news and programs about the NC being supported by government organized organizations such as USDA (Union Solidarity and Development Association), Women Association, veteran and Firefighters.

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## **Insurgent-planted mines killed 2, injured 2 in Ye**

Kaowao; October 10, 2007

Two people have been killed by insurgent-planted landmines in Ye Township, Mon State according to SPDC’s official newspaper reported Wednesday.

The 2 villagers died and other 2 wounded when they respectively stepped on mines allegedly planted by insurgents in Ye Township, Mon State while one person died and two were wounded in Kyaukkyi Township, Karen State on Monday, the state-run media said.

“It is difficult to confirm which groups planted the mines because the SPDC and guerrilla groups are often fighting in this area”, a leader of cease-fire New Mon State Party said.

Out of the four villagers who went hunting in the Padaung mountain range, south-east of Hangan Village, Ye Township, U Aung Htay and U Maung Win were killed and U Ah Maung and U Kyaw Myint injured as they stepped on a mine.

So far during this year, some shooting incidents by insurgents in the country were also reported by the state-run media.

The Burma Army normally takes villagers in Ye Township to carry ammunition during their offensives against Mon guerrillas.

At least 231 people in Burma were maimed or killed by landmines in 2005, the International Campaign To Ban Landmines said in its 2006 report.

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### Environment

#### **Villagers ignored - Sand exported from Gyaing River to Singapore**

Kaowao: October 10, 2007

Burmese authorities did not inform local villagers about the project of Myat Wadi Trading Limited according to inhabitants of a river-side village.

The Myat Wadi Trading Limited collected sand from along the Gyaing River and exported it to Singapore 10 times in one month, claims a source from the *‘Weekly Eleven Journal’ last month.*

A Kaowao reporter was told, “Although villagers saw the working boats, they thought they were being used for construction in town. We only found out what they were really being used

for when I asked them. Authorities did not inform anyone about the project, not even the village headmen along the river.”

Star Height Asia Pacific Pty. Ltd. received permission in April 2007 to export sand from the Gyaing River, under an agreement between governments from both countries.

Earth Rights International Burma Project Coordinator, Ko Naing Htoo discussed some of the problems of this project with Kaowao. “First of all the activity will disturb the ecosystem and environment in the area. Stored within the sand layers are chemicals that build up over time with pollution or sometimes through nature; digging the sand banks out means these chemicals will be stirred up and released, whereas previously they were stored neatly in a water column. Also, this type of activity will have serious impacts on downstream communities, including their access to clean, safe water.”

He went on to say that the government should conduct intensive research on the impact of the project and provide the results of that, both positive and negative, to the local people.

Taing Pakao, of Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO) based in Thai-Burma border, is a prominent environmentalist who was most recently published in a report about the Salween (Than Lwin) Dam titled ‘In the Balance’. Discussing the social impact with a Kaowao reporter he stated, “This is destroying the community’s livelihood. They have lived in this area for so long through growing agriculture; if the river’s ecosystem is destroyed so too is their livelihood.”

Ms. Mi Jarai Non, another Mon environmentalist said, “If they absorb a lot of sand, water pollution occurs and underwater species will disappear. Erosion along the riverbank will undoubtedly cause trees to collapse.”

After collecting the sand, it is cleaned near the Mawlamyine Mottama Bridge. It is then exported from Mawlamyine seaport to Singapore by the large HENG- 8289 ship, capable of carrying 3500 tons.

Over the last 5 months, they have removed samples from the Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Than Lwin rivers for experimentation. In the end however they chose the Gyaing River.

The *Weekly Eleven*’ news said that, “On September 5, 2007, they started to carry out the sand to a Singapore Company.”

According to this weekly news publication, the Myat Wadi representative did not say how much money this trading with the Singapore Company would generate.

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## **Junta Bans Traditional Festival Donations in Three Pagodas Pass**

Kaowao; October 8, 2007

The Burmese military authorities in Three Pagodas Pass on the Thailand-Burma border have banned traditional festival donations to monks on this full moon day, according to a source from the border town.

In earlier years over 700 monks from three different monasteries and many monks from the local township came to this festival.

However, the military has ordered them to stop the practice during the festival this year.

"On the evening of the October 6, the Burmese checkpoints that open illegally were closed to all business except exporting materials. On October 7 they were closed completely," a businessman said.

Nowadays people find it difficult to cross checkpoints in the area and it is hard for visitors to stay in the Three Pagodas Pass.

"The authorities already hold a list of all family members in the Three Pagodas area. If you are on the list you can receive visitors but if the visitor goes outside at night he will be investigated," a Three Pagodas Pass villager said.

"On October 6, the Burmese soldiers were interrogating protesters who fled from inside Burma", said a villager connected to the township authorities.

Currently in an effort to seek out the protesters who ran from inside Burma, Thai checkpoints are checking all travelers more than before.

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## Interview With Harn Yawngwe

*"Reconciliation through Dialogue" is the Name of The Game in Burma Politics*

**Chinland Guardian:** October 16, 2007, Ottawa

*While the whole world is condemning the Junta after it's brutal crackdown against peaceful demonstrators in Burma, Chinland Guardian has a chance to interview Harn Yawngwe one of the most capable strategists and influential leaders among Burma's pro-democracy movement. Harn Yawngwe is director of National Reconciliation Program and Brussels based Euro-Burma Office. He is senior advisor to Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) the council that represent 7 non-Burman ethnic states. Harn Yawngwe is the son of Sao Shwe Thaik the last prince of Yawngwe and the first president of the Republic of Union of Burma.*

Chinland Guardian: It is a pity to watch the people movement crushed by the SPDC. Is there any option left for positive change in Burma soon?

Harn Yawngwe: It depends on how you define positive change. If you mean 'an immediate regime change' either by a people's uprising, a military coup d'etat, intervention by UN or US forces; or the SPDC willingly handing over power to DASSK, the answer is definitely 'No'. None of these will happen soon if ever. But if you define positive change as an opportunity to change the power equation in Burma and bring about a political solution, the answer is a qualified 'Yes'. I say qualified because it will depend on how skillful we are and how willing we are to take risks. Most people expect that because of international pressure, the SPDC will hand over power. They are not, however, willing to risk engaging with the SPDC in case it is a trick or in case the SPDC wins. If we engage the SPDC in a dialogue and can get the international pressure to continue, we could maybe see a real dialogue take place between DASSK and the SPDC. The international community has never been this united in wanting to see change in Burma. We have to provide the way to make that change happen.

Chinland Guardian: During the monk led demonstration, one of the main demands included "National Reconciliation". Why is that? What kind of "National Reconciliation" is needed in Burma?

Harn Yawngwe: The monks asked for 'National Reconciliation' because they recognized that political problems are at the root of the economic problems. They know that toppling the regime is not the answer. They want a peaceful transition. They recognized that the Union of Burma is a very divided nation – the military versus civilians; the rich versus the poor; Buddhists versus Muslims and Christians; Burmans versus ethnic nationalities; ethnic nationalities versus minorities; ceasefire groups versus non-ceasefire groups; those who want democracy first versus those who want economic development first; those who want an immediate regime change versus those who want a transition; those who want sanctions versus

who want engagement; etc. Religious people are supposed to be peacemakers, so the monks asked 'national reconciliation' as a first step to heal the deep wounds. Over the last 60 years, we have been divided and sub-divided until today we can say that society in Burma has been fragmented or atomized. Only the military has been left as an institution of state. If we want democracy, we have to re-build a cohesive society. That means reconciling differences through dialogue, understanding and accepting that diversity in the nation is an asset rather than a weakness. We need unity but not uniformity. A Chin can never be the same as a Shan and a Shan can never be the same as a Burman. But we can all be united by working for the same goals.

Chinland Guardian: The recent statement made by Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) encouraged Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (DASSK) to accept the offer made by Gen. Than Shwe, to meet with her in spite of the precondition made by the General. What is your opinion on that statement?

Harn Yawngwe: The ENC did not encourage DASSK to accept the offer. The ENC asked her to seriously consider it. There is a difference. The ENC cannot make the decision for her. She has to make the decision herself. The ENC asked her to seriously consider it because first of all, she has always asked for a dialogue to solve the problems that we face in Burma. Secondly, it is ENC policy to find political solutions for political problems and it is the ENC's strategy to find such solutions through a tripartite dialogue. Thirdly, all the monks and demonstrators asked for national reconciliation and a dialogue. Should DASSK not try to fulfill the demands of the people who risked their lives? Fourth – the international community is asking the SPDC to have a dialogue with DASSK in order to have national reconciliation. If she refuses to have a dialogue, the SPDC will have an excuse to say that they were willing but she refused. In such a case, there would be no role left for either Gambari, the UN or the UN Security Council. Fifth – the SPDC has always refused to have a dialogue because it believes that force is the only way to solve any problem. Should we not be encouraging them to find other solutions? Sixth – last but not least, the future of the whole of the Union of Burma depends on whether we can bring about change now. That change depends on whether or not there is a dialogue. DASSK must think about the future of the nation and all its peoples. She cannot think as a private person or even as the leader of the NLD. She must also think on behalf of the ethnic people including the ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups. I am sure she is very aware of this and has not yet responded to the SPDC. Her party and others, however, have without thinking seriously responded in a negative way. The key to change is to get a real dialogue started. We should then use the international attention to force the SPDC into a substantive dialogue. As for the pre-conditions, I see them as a face saving device for the SPDC. Than Shwe cannot be seen as having given in to international pressure. He needs to be able to justify why he is talking to DASSK. If she agrees, he can say she is giving in to him so he is talking to her. We must not forget that in Burmese culture, he is older and she is a woman. So, in his mind it is more natural for her to give in. If we look at the preconditions carefully, there is nothing she cannot really agree to:

*Confrontation/ Utter devastation* – The SPDC claims that 'utter devastation' is what she threatened the SPDC with. This is not true. She said there is a need to dialogue and solve the problem. Otherwise the country will face utter devastation. So she can easily say, her policy is always to have a dialogue and find a political solution, that she does not want confrontation and that she does not want utter devastation for anyone, not for the SPDC, and least of all for the country.

*Sanctions* – The NLD has stated clearly that it is not NLD policy to call for sanctions. The countries that imposed sanctions did so because of the way the SPDC was behaving. She can say that in the interest of the people, she believes that a dialogue is needed, and so for the time being she would like to facilitate a dialogue by calling for a moratorium (to withhold) on sanctions. The countries that have sanctions will not automatically lift them just because she says so. The most they will do is say, they support a dialogue and are willing to lift sanctions once they see progress. This is a great way to make the dialogue substantive.

*1990 elections* – DASSK has always said she is not seeking power. She has always called for a dialogue. She can say that if a dialogue will provide an answer to how the 1990 election results can be taken into account, she is willing to start the dialogue without the precondition that the 1990 election results must be respected immediately. But she can further say that she herself was never elected, so she cannot make a decision on behalf of those who were elected. To make it binding, she will need to consult with all those who were elected and their parties. This is a very reasonable request. The international community will support it. This will make it very hard for the SPDC to refuse and it may open up more political space and maybe even bring about the release of MPs.

*SPDC Road Map* – DASSK can say that she in principle she agrees to a transition period. All transitions need a Road Map and a timetable, and that she is willing to accept the steps outlined in the SPDC Road Map. She can further say that the dialogue will determine the timetable and the contents of the Road Map.

If she can handle these and other preconditions in a skilful way, the SPDC will have to respond. If they do not, they will be blamed for the failure of the talks. If she rejects the preconditions, she will be blamed for the failure of the talks that everyone wants.

Chinland Guardian: Why one of the stake holders, Non-Burman Ethnic Nationalities, not mentioned in the talk?

Harn Yawngwe: Actually, point No.3 of the ENC statement affirmed that a 'tripartite dialogue' is needed to solve Burma's problems. Point No.2 did not mention it because it is talking about the offer made by Than Shwe to DASSK. He did not make the offer to the ethnic nationalities. In any case, the ENC views a dialogue or talks as a process. It is not something that takes place once or twice. The ENC is also certain that the problem in Burma cannot be resolved either by the SPDC or DASSK without bringing in the ethnic nationalities. They will at one point have to

bring in the ethnic nationalities into the process. This is because no ethnic nationality will accept a decision made for them. They must decide for their own future.

Chinland Guardian: How is the prospect of "Tripartite Dialogue"?

Harn Yawngnwe: Again it depends on how you define it. If you think it means SPDC + NLD + ENC = Tripartite, the answer is that the prospect for such a dialogue is slim. Why?

The SPDC does not believe in a dialogue. It believes it can solve problems by the use of force and it is the only one that should decide Burma's future.

The SPDC is agreeing to talk with DASSK because of international pressure based on the recent domestic demonstrations and its aftermath.

The SPDC will do as little as possible. If it is further pressured, it might agree to include the ceasefire groups, not the non-ceasefire or exile groups.

On the other hand, if you define a 'Tripartite Dialogue' as where the concerns of the ethnic people are addressed, the prospects are good. Why?

The international community including China is calling for inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation;

DASSK agrees to the UNGA resolution calling for a tripartite dialogue;

The ENC is seen by the international community as a credible organization and its recommendations are taken seriously;

As far as the ENC is concerned, it does not matter if it is invited or not. The key is to ensure that true ethnic representation is included in the talks. These can be ceasefire, non-ceasefire or even political parties. The key is to ensure all ethnic parties have the same policies regarding the constitution.

Chinland Guardian: The SPDC is rallying the people to support their National Convention in Ethnic States like Kachin and Chin State. What step should the opposition groups take now?

Harn Yawngnwe: The SPDC is determined to go ahead with its NC and Road Map – dialogue or no dialogue. Hopefully, the dialogue will be substantive and can contribute to the modification of the Road Map. At least a time frame for a transition can be agreed to. However, the ethnic states should not depend on the outcome of the dialogue. As far as I know, ENC

strategy is as follows (Hope for the best, prepare for the worst):

1. Prepare for a long term campaign by:
  - a) Empowering the people;
  - b) Protecting the civilian population;
  - c) Improving civil administration;
  - d) Building up the capacity of political parties and engaging in SPDC politics;
  
2. Prepare for the medium term by:
  - a) Preparing to resume hostilities if the SPDC tries to disarm groups prematurely before the dialogue can reach an agreement;
  - b) Preparing to engage politically if no agreement can be reached;
  - c) Preparing to engage politically if some agreement can be reached;
  
3. Immediately:
  - a) Engaging with the SPDC in a dialogue;
  - b) Engaging with the international community in a dialogue;
  - c) Engaging with the people in a dialogue;
  - d) Engaging with democracy activists in a dialogue.

Chinland Guardian: Recent uprising in Burma gained overwhelming international attention. But, needless to say, action is needed. What kind of international action would be most productive for positive change in Burma?

Harn Yawngnwe: Many Burmese believe more sanctions are needed to bring down the regime. I personally believe that this is the wrong strategy. Why?

The international community will not act to bring down the regime. They, especially the neighbours, are scared of anarchy and instability;

The West has no economic interest in Burma to risk bringing it down. The cost benefit relationship is not in favour of intervention;

The UN system is overstretched. It cannot handle another major crisis even if there is the will to intervene (There is none as describe in No.2);

Other options short of intervention will not bring the regime down. Sanctions are mostly cosmetic and do not affect the generals;

Bringing the regime down will not solve problems. If the SPDC goes, we might have to deal with 13 dictators (the regional commanders) instead of one. They have everything to lose and are not likely to favour dialogue either;

If there are 13 dictators, not counting the ceasefire armies, our giant neighbours might be compelled to intervene to protect their national interest if there is anarchy and instability. It is not impossible to see Chin State and Sagaing Division – maybe even Magwe annexed by India; Arakan State annexed by Bangladesh; Kachin State, Mandalay Division, Shan State, Karenni State, Pegu, Rangoon and Irrawaddy Division annexed by China; Karen and Mon State and Tenasserim Division annexed by Thailand.

The international community is the most united now – UN, US, EU, China, ASEAN – all agree that there needs to be a dialogue and national reconciliation. At the moment Gambari is the main interlocutor. He gets on well with the generals and with DASSK. He is well aware that the dialogue process has to be inclusive – meaning the ethnic nationalities. This is also China's position.

Gambari is backed by the UN Security Council. China wants to see this work. It does not want the issue to go to the Security Council for its own reasons. At the moment the UN Security Council only deals with 'hard' security issues – war, regional stability, etc. it does not deal with 'soft' security issues – democracy and human rights. If Burma becomes a UN Security matter, the scope of the UNSC will be expanded to include 'soft' security issues. This is dangerous for Russia and China. Both will veto it regardless of what is at stake in Burma.

Asking for UNSC sanctions will not help because China and Russia will veto it. Even if the UNSC could agree, the question is this – What will the UN do if the SPDC refuses to comply? So it is not useful to push for a UNSC resolution if the UN cannot act. In the Darfur case, the UN had to get the Sudan Government to agree before the UN could send a peacekeeping force. SPDC is unlikely to agree.

The best option is to continue with Gambari. He will need the UN Security Council and multi-party talks to back him up. The Gambari mission in turn will push for substantive dialogue in Burma.

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## **Burma: 2007 Uprising and Transitional Challenges**

**By Nehginpao Kipgen**

The biggest uprising in nearly two decades, since 1988, has once again brought Burma\* into the spotlight of international politics. The 2007 uprising is the consequence and subsequence of the 1988 mass uprising.

The students' community, under the aegis of 8888 Generation Students, led the peaceful march on August 19. To prevent further escalation, the military authority arrested prominent student leaders and other active pro-democracy activists.

**Economic mismanagement, spiraling out of the country's political** imbroglio, was the immediate cause for this public outrage. The protests may have been suppressed with coercion, yet the spirit of people's desire for change will persist.

Given the history of Burmese army brutality on its own people, many analysts and observers initially did not expect the sporadic demonstrations to mushroom into a large scale one, especially in the absence of student leaders. The momentum surged when the highly revered Buddhist monks and nuns joined the movement.

The protesters three basic demands were: lowering consumer prices, release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and national reconciliation.

On September 5, a peaceful demonstration of Buddhist monks in Pakokku, a town in the Magway Division, was forcibly dispersed by the government troops, injuring three monks.

The next day, in retaliation, the monks took few military officials as hostages. The monks demanded an apology from the government by giving a deadline of September 17, but the military refused to apologize.

The protests continued and spread out across the country including Rangoon, Mandalay, Pakokku and Sittwe. The largest turnout was visible in Rangoon on September 24 in which about a hundred thousand people - largely monks and nuns given protection by civilians by forming a human chain - joined the protest.

The Alliance of All Burmese Monks vowed to continue the agitation until the military dictatorship is deposed. This was a further step taken by the monks from its previous demand for apology from the military.

The brutal crackdown began on September 26 when soldiers rained down on protesters with bullets, batons and teargas. It continued through the night and to the next day. The state media reported that 10 people were killed including a Japanese photographer Kenji Nagai. Unconfirmed sources, however, have reported that about two hundred people have been killed.

In a closed society like Burma, the accurate number of deaths might never be known as it happened in 1988 when at least three thousand demonstrators, mostly students, were believed to have been massacred.

Technology advancement has greatly contributed to the ongoing democratic struggle. During the 1988 uprising, not much stories and activism inside were seen by the outside world. There were also lesser Burmese democracy activists around the world.

The 2007 uprising was watched by the whole world; more importantly, the political turmoil coincided with the 62<sup>nd</sup> United Nations General Assembly session, attended by world leaders. Indeed, there has never been in history when the situation in Burma has gotten such incredible world's attention.

Thousands of Burmese people and supporters around the world have shown their solidarity, and simultaneously appealed for greater intervention by the international community. **Political developments at international arena have impacts on activities inside Burma and vice versa.**

After mass arrest and brutal crackdown, the 2007 uprising has apparently ended. Looking at the history of Burma as we analyze the current precarious atmosphere has given us some strategies on how to push forward the democratization process.

In less than three weeks time, the UN Security Council has discussed the Burma situation four times - September 20 and 26 and October 5 and 8. The council released a statement today deploring the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators and urged for genuine dialogue.

On October 4, Burma's state television MRTV broadcast that Senior General Than Shwe was willing to talk with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi under certain conditions. Though this could be construed as a gesture of buying time on the part of Than Shwe, it is an interesting

development from UN Secretary General special envoy Ibrahim Gambari's four-day (September 29 to October 2) visit to the country.

Subsequently, the United States Acting Ambassador to Burma Shari Villarosa was summoned to Nay Pi Taw, the remote administrative capital, for talks with the State Peace and Development Council Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint. Details of the talk have not been disclosed, but it was said to be not productive.

In yet another development on October 7, the military announced the appointment of its Deputy Labor Minister to the post of liaison officer. If accepted by all parties, the minister will coordinate talks between the military, Aung San Suu Kyi led opposition and the United Nations.

If Aung San Suu Kyi is freed from house arrest and allowed to consult her own National League for Democracy party leaders and leaders of ethnic minority groups, talks could become an important step toward a national reconciliation. In the process, compromises have to be made by all participating parties at some point.

Although not overtly expressed, the army generals are believed to have been worried about their own safety after power transfer to a civilian government. The military may ask the opposition or mediator or both for some sort of immunity. Should this come to pass, serious consideration needs to be given.

Moreover, given the ethno-political nature of conflicts in Burma since the country's independence, ethnic nationalities, other than the Burmans, would also like to voice their concerns and advocate for tripartite talks – military, 1990 election winning parties led by Aung San Suu Kyi and minority ethnic groups - as endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly since 1994.

For any negotiated settlement to be reached in Burma, the role of a mediator is perceived to be crucial. In this context, the mission of the good offices of the United Nations Secretary General is largely welcome and supported by all parties. UN Special envoy Gambari is again expected to visit Burma sometime in November.

If the United Nations engagement does not bring the country toward reconciliation, other alternatives should also be available on the table. One among them would be the United States taking the lead in engaging with Burma, similar to the six party talks on North Korean nuclear issue.

Six party talks involving the United States, European Union, ASEAN, China, India, and Burma could break the iceberg of decades' old political crisis. Due to geographical proximity, enormous economic and diplomatic influence over Burma, China's participation is pivotal.

Given the adamant stance of China on the ground that Burma's problems is an internal matter and does not constitute a threat to international peace and security, any pragmatic action from the UN Security Council is unlikely to emerge in the near future. P5 affirmative vote or the non-use of veto power can make the Security Council an effective channel to solve conflicts in Burma.

A change from within the country is more likely if there develops an open split within the ranks and files in the military. Civil disobedience or non-cooperation movement is one other effective political tool the people of Burma has.

*Nehginpao Kipgen is the General Secretary of US-based Kuki International Forum and a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Burma (1947-2004).*

*\* Burma is the 40<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world and the largest in mainland Southeast Asia with a total area of 261,969 square miles (678,500 square kilometers) somewhat smaller than the size of Texas state here in the United States.*

Note: This paper was presented at a panel discussion on "Burma: Analyzing & Understanding the Conflict" at George Mason University, Virginia, USA on October 11, 2007.

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*Opinion/Analysis*

*Pro-democracy writer **Bo Nyein** argues that the opposition against the military government in Burma may be courageous and PR-savvy, but they are unprofessional and disorganized.*

## **The Fatal Flaws of Burma's Opposition**

*By **Bo Nyein***

The brutal crackdown is underway and the brave souls who played a part in the resistance in Burma are now paying for their courage with beatings, interrogation and torture.

Many in the West will go back to their rhetoric, denouncing the Burmese military junta, making statements and asking the generals for a peaceful transition to democracy. The media and political elite will doubtlessly rush forward again, blaming the generals and asking for more sanctions. But who dares dig deep down, face the truth and ask: why did the uprising fail?

The current uprising has revealed an ugly truth: there is a near total disconnect between people inside Burma and activists' movements outside the country. They are two disjointed parallel worlds. Inside Burma, people are struggling to face the brutal suppression without much help, while outside most of the exile leaders are focusing on lobbying and public relations.

The most hurtful consequence of this duality was that when the uprising was gaining momentum and young leaders were begging for help on strategy asking what the next move, they were left rudderless. When young leaders were begging for guidance from the experienced leaders of previous uprisings, there were very few who bothered to return their calls. Why? Many were too busy competing for airtime on talk shows to respond to these cries for help from the inside.

Burmese military leaders have systematically crushed the opposition internally. The exiled leaders still have no clue of what is needed to face these military dictators. The result is that there is no political infrastructure to mobilize the masses, and, most importantly, there is a total generation gap in the leadership.

Nor is the problem confined to the Burmese opposition. Western democracies are totally focused on bringing the generals to the negotiation table with Daw Aung Suu Kyi (DASSK) by imposing sanctions on the Burmese government — a strategy they have pursued without success for the last 18 years.

It may have been feasible in early 1990s when the military junta was emerging from a total government breakdown following the earlier national uprising and their foreign reserves were down to less than 30 millions dollars. They were vulnerable then. But the street-smart generals soon addressed their weaknesses: they made peace with drug lords and survived on profits made from money laundering. Then the SPDC, the State Peace and Development Council, which is the official name for the military junta — systematically implemented a triangulation foreign policy of building a relationship with China, ASEAN and India to neutralize Western sanctions. The Burmese generals understood full well that Burma sat between ASEAN and South Indian nations and played the geopolitical card. Worse yet, they found gas; now the generals have even befriended the Russians and Koreans in addition to their Thai, Chinese, Indians and the French pals by using the global energy shortage to their advantage. Thus strengthened, the canny generals can not only secure the Russian and Chinese vetoes at the

United National Security Council to cover their brutality, they could even neutralize the South African vote.

While the generals were working hard, and going from strength to strength, the exile leaders led by NCGUB —the government-in-exile— were squandering their opportunities. They spent nearly two decades begging for funds, yet failed to build the necessary political infrastructure both inside and outside Burma. When crunch time came, as it did recently, there was no infrastructure and leadership in place to lead the uprising. The result is the terrible suppression that follows defeat, whose horrors we can only barely glimpse. Both the Bush administration and leaders from the Congress have made the mistake of putting all eggs in one basket of blindly supporting NCGUB in the belief that their leader, who was the cousin of DASSK, was a preferred leader in exile. As in Iraq, where the Bush administration was fooled by Chalabi, the Americans naively supported the incompetent NCGUB instead of studying the existing Burmese organizations, the Burmese way of thinking, and understanding the dynamics among the leaders to carefully groom younger generation leaders for future uprisings, both inside and outside the country.

After 18 years, the Burmese generals have amassed enough cash to expand the army and build an oppressive intelligence machine to systematically crush any opposition while National League for Democracy (NLD) -DASSK's party- is close to collapse after severe oppression and isolation. SPDC is carefully using time and space to wear the resistance down. The generals are cunningly keeping the Western focus only on Daw Suu (DASSK) and NLD, the better to make them reinforce failure rather than look about for new avenues to success. When Daw Suu was detained, when all hopes were being destroyed, and while her party was brutally crushed and opposition became weaker daily, DASSK naturally became the sole beacon of hope. Despairing people came to believe that only she could walk the last mile to lead the people closer to victory. But great as she is, she alone cannot create miracles, and Burmese people over world must realize that it take people, organization and a political infrastructure to face these military dictators.

The failure of the uprising was at heart a systemic failure which the Burmese —both with the country and in the outside world— must acknowledge before they can face the challenge of setting things straight. Otherwise, there will be another uprising someday, but it will end in the same tragic way: starting with hope, only to be dashed by another crackdown, to be predictably followed by yet more futile Western efforts that fail to bring freedom and democracy in Burma.

DASSK is now in her 60s and her time is nearing an end; in contrast, SPDC has trained the next generation of military leaders to take the place of Than Shwe and Mg Aye, the two ruling senior generals. Time is not on our side. Now is the time to reevaluate the situation, make hard decisions and change tack to face reality.

Timetotalk.org

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## ABOUT US

Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide more of an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting peace and change within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.

*Our motto is working together for change and lasting peace.*