



# AUNG SAN SUU KYI PREDICTABLY 'GUILTY'

The show trial endured for 86 days by Aung San Suu Kyi and her two maids ended on 11 August with the predictable guilty verdict and a sentence of three years' hard labour, commuted to a further eighteen months under house arrest, by an order signed the day before the judgment by Senior General Than Shwe - a pretence of leniency which will serve his purpose: to keep her in detention until after the sham elections scheduled for 2010. World reactions were equally predictable. The charges, the court and its conduct were immediately denounced by four UN Special Rapporteurs. The conviction was vehemently condemned by Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin, and by Britain's PM Gordon Brown. Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines urged an appeal by ASEAN for Suu Kyi's immediate release, but were opposed by Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and China, and its communiqué spoke merely of 'disappointment'.

At the UN Security Council the US, UK and France faced the reluctance of China, Russia, Vietnam and Libya to condemn the verdict and sentence, and a statement on 13 August expressed only 'serious concern'. The EU,

continuing to demand the Nobel Prizewinner's immediate release, imposed financial sanctions on her four judges and subjected state-owned media associated with the junta, as well as 58 other enterprises, to an asset freeze. Concurrently, protests were mounted worldwide by pro-democracy organisations, including Burma Action Ireland (see back page).

Less predictable, in its immediate and future effects, was the visit to Burma, between 14 and 16 August, by US Senator Jim Webb. A highly decorated ex-Marine, as a Republican he had served in the Reagan administration, but since his election as a Democrat in 2006 has been one of his party's leading voices in the Senate. He chairs its Foreign Relations Sub-committee on East Asia, and on Burma has taken an anti-sanctions stance. Welcomed therefore by the generals, he spoke to both Than Shwe and Suu Kyi - gaining, he claimed, a 'clear impression' that she was not opposed to lifting 'some sanctions' - and somewhat surprisingly secured the release and repatriation of John Yettaw, who as her uninvited 'guest' had been sentenced to seven years. Webb's views have been widely rebutted, for instance by the US State Department and by Burma's Government-in-



*Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Meeting with Senator Jim Webb.*

exile, who insist that sanctions must stay until the generals free all political prisoners and engage in talks with the opposition, but to what extent, if any, he will influence the US Administration in an ongoing review of its policy remains unclear.

At the trial, Suu Kyi blamed Yettaw's intrusion on laxity by the junta's armed patrols. She has therefore been planning since to enhance her own security, especially by installing a grille in the door of her veranda. More importantly, on 3 September her lawyer lodged an appeal against the verdict, and complained of greater strictness in the terms of her house arrest; for instance her family doctor, who previously paid regular visits, has been replaced by one appointed by the junta.

## BURMA'S SHOCKING HR RECORD REMAINS A PROBLEM FOR ASEAN

At its 14th summit, ASEAN's leaders have agreed to give effect to Article 14 of their charter, which mandates the setting up of an ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB). As a member of ASEAN, Burma will be a member of the new body with a representative on its governing commission.

The AHRB received a stormy reception even before it was established. Critics pointed to the woefully inadequate response of ASEAN members to the displacement of thousands of Rohingya people from Burma, many of whom

fled to other ASEAN countries on flimsy sea vessels. Mealy-mouthedly pandering to ethnic cleansing is hardly a good place from which to start a new human rights body, and there are fears that the AHRB may give a false veneer of human rights compliance to the pariah Burmese military.

Nonetheless, the new organisation could also bring a new focus to the regional dimension of Burmese human rights abuses. The AHRB's stance towards the Burmese military will most likely define the new body, as it cannot credibly

ignore the systemic abuses within Burma. In this sense, it seems destined to become either a platform or a target for Burmese human rights advocates in the region - a valuable asset either way.

Furthermore, the AHRB may become a source of embarrassment to the Burmese military, as member countries must agree a new Declaration of Human Rights for the region and a Burmese representative will have to be sent to sit on the AHRB commission - an impossibly difficult position.



# BURMESE ARMY INCREASES ASSAULTS ON ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

Heavy fighting has been reported in several areas on Burma's borders as the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) increases assaults on ethnic minority groups, in the run-up to the elections next year. The most recent attacks have taken place in the Kokang and Wa areas of Shan State, causing over 30,000 refugees to seek safety in China. Kokang has a large ethnic Chinese population. It is believed that the Tatmadaw was trying to destroy an arms factory used by the Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army. The neighbouring ethnic minority United Wa State Army has also been under attack. This follows moves by the Burmese government to force the ethnic minority armed groups to become incorporated into the Tatmadaw, moves which have effectively broken up the ceasefire agreements in the area. Tensions have been rising in the border areas for months as the military junta has increased the pressure on various ethnic rebel ceasefire groups, such as the Kachin, Kokang and Wa, to surrender their arms. The Burmese government aims to use these groups (once integrated into the Tatmadaw) as border police guard units, but many ethnic groups along the Chinese border are resisting this 'integration'.

Responding to the situation, Chinese officials

were reported to be 'extremely upset'. China made it plain that the refugees should return into Burma as soon as possible, and offered to mediate. Fears about looting also contributed to the return of many refugees, once the fierce fighting had subsided. The Chinese authorities are understood to have received an apology from the Burmese government, underlining the relationship between the two.

In earlier attacks, up to 500 houses were burnt down by the Burmese army near Laihka town in Shan state between 27 July and 1 August, uprooting around 10,000 civilians. According to a Shan Rights Group in Thailand, the scorched earth campaign has focused on Laikha township, where over 100 villagers, including women, have been arrested and tortured, and three have died. Many of these were displaced by the campaign waged in the area by the Tatmadaw between 1996 and 1998.

Over recent months, other border areas, including Chin state and Rakhine state, have suffered increased military attacks which have caused heavy flows of refugees into neighbouring countries. New reports of heightened military activity in Karen state also speak of over 4,000 refugees fleeing from the fighting in the Mae Kathar area and into Thailand.



Burmese Refugees

The United States has expressed its 'deep concern' over the Burmese regime's attacks on ethnic minority groups. It has exhorted the generals to halt the military campaigns against them, and to begin 'genuine dialogue' with the ethnic minorities, to which about a third of the Burmese population belong.

## War and Business as Usual on Salween River Sites

As fighting between ethnic groups and the Burmese Army exploded in Shan State, the founder of Earth Rights, Ka Hsaw Wa, warned of his extreme concern for human rights and dangers to the natural environment along the Salween River, which forms part of the Burmese border with China and Thailand. Ka Hsaw Wa was recently awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Prize, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize. In his first lecture as laureate, he declared that forced labour, rape, torture and displacement of ethnic communities, as well as environmental degradation, will again be facts of life for the Burmese along the route of the new Shwe gas pipeline, as long as foreign corporations connive with the military junta for business. The intense fighting in Kokang was occurring less than 15km from the site of a major new dam being built by the Chinese, which will displace hundreds of villages and submerge vast areas of richly diverse forest. The area is home to over 140 species of rare mammals, while plant hunters have recorded more than 800 species of orchids there too. He also expressed grave concerns for the impact the developments will have on



Protesters beside the Salween River.

climate change.

The Kunlong dam is one of five mega dams being planned on the Salween River in Burma by the ruling junta with Chinese and Thai companies, for hydro power to be sold to China and Thailand. 'The renewed fighting and the exodus of refugees into Yunnan should be a wake-up call to China about the risks of investing in Burma,' said

a spokesman for the Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation. He said that two hundred villagers had already been killed in the recent fighting there. 'Not only is there no free and informed consent to these dam projects, but they are being built over the bodies of our people.' It is estimated that the Shwe Gas Project will earn over US\$37m a year for the Burmese junta.



## INSIDE BURMA

### Burmese Junta Prepares for 2010 Elections

The 2008 referendum, held in the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, is claimed by the Burmese Military Junta to have been carried with a 92% majority, although almost all observers believe that it was neither free nor fair. The next step for the Junta is to hold elections, promised in 2010 (no date yet), and reports are coming in of the Burmese Authorities' attempting to curry favour with the population. The Union Solidarity and Defence Association (USDA), which has provided 'rent-a-crowd' services to the military in the past, is now being funded to assume the role of a political party. Election-style promises are reported, about new roads to be built or local libraries to be set up.

The authorities in several areas of Rangoon are also taking a census of adults. No population census has been held in Burma since the last one conducted by the British in the 1930s. The authorities are reportedly threatening to remove anyone working abroad from the family lists. Citizens who are removed from their family lists cease to exist legally, and this makes obtaining identification papers and passports very difficult unless they pay large sums of money to be reinstated.

Local authorities in Arakan and Mon states also ordered village headmen to conduct censuses during August.

### International Anxiety over Possible Nuclear Deal with North Korea

In August, a group of Australian Burma experts received reports from two Burmese Army defectors about new deals being made for the Burmese Military Junta to receive North Korean nuclear technical advisers in return for supplying North Korea with 'yellowcake' (unprocessed) uranium. Burma is naturally rich in uranium. On his visit to Burma to free the interloper, Mr Yettaw, US Senator Jim Webb was reassured by the regime that there was no weapons capability in view, but many in the international community doubt the validity

of these reassurances.

The two defectors are both regarded as credible sources. One was an officer with a secret nuclear battalion in the Burmese army who was sent to Moscow for two years' training. He was part of a nuclear programme which planned to train 1,000 Burmese. The other, who died two years ago, was a former executive of the regime's leading business partner, Htoo Trading, and he handled nuclear contracts with Russia and North Korea. 'They [the generals] say it is to produce medical isotopes for health purposes in hospitals. How many hospitals in Burma have nuclear science?' he asked. 'Burma can barely get electricity up and



Senior General Than Shwe – Nuclear Ambitions? running. It's nonsense,' he said.

### Computer Show in Rangoon

Discounted laptop computers and a fashion catwalk are featured in the 'Electronic and Living '09' computer trade fair in Rangoon this September. Well-known computer brands will be represented, including Acer and Toshiba. KMD group of companies, which has over 39 centres in Burma, will be showcasing their computers and accessories.

### Money for Old Wood

The Burmese generals have discovered yet another means of making money. They are reported to be auctioning the stumps of ancient mangrove trees which blew down in the Irrawaddy Delta during Cyclone Nargis. Some of the wood is thought to be over 100 years old. The stumps are being sold as artistic items, possibly for sculptors and collectors.

Meanwhile, the junta denies assistance to villagers in the Delta to rebuild their homes

## Death of Martin Lacey, RIP, co-founder of Burma Action Ireland

Burma Action Ireland is saddened by the recent death of one of our founding members, Martin Lacey. A man of integrity and principle, he was a key figure in the establishment of BAI in 1996, after having seen John Boorman's film, 'Beyond Rangoon'. To this day he remained the only member of our committee to have met Burma's democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Martin was a strong believer in finding a peaceful solution to the political and humanitarian crisis in Burma. He was liked and admired by all within the Burma solidarity movement for his rational analysis, good judgement and sense of compassion.

We in BAI owe him a great debt. The Burmese solidarity community in Ireland has lost a beacon of kindness and goodness.

We extend our deepest condolences to his family.

## How you can help

### Protest against the oppression of the Burmese people and the detention of Daw Suu Kyi

Write appeals to the Burmese military regime, calling for the safe release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners including Buddhist monks. Please ask the SPDC to take action on the following:

- To end the continuing violations of the human rights of women, in particular forced labour, forced relocations, abuse, torture, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse in detention and summary executions, often committed by military personnel,
- To end the systematic forced displacements of persons and the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and create adequate conditions for their safe and voluntary return and complete reintegration, and to allow humanitarian personnel safe access to assist their return and reintegration.

### Please address your action letters to the following:

Lieutenant General Thein Sein,  
Prime Minister, State Peace and Development Council, Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar.

BAI would appreciate it very much if you could send us a copy of your letter(s).



## BURMA SPOTLIGHTED IN IRELAND

Renewed world concern over the situation in Burma has been reflected of late in Ireland, in whose media it has received unprecedented attention. BAI has played its part. On 14 July members joined a capacity audience at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin for the international launch of *Burma VJ* (see review, page 3). In advance of Aung San Suu Kyi's 64th birthday on 19 June, politicians, celebrities and other supporters worldwide responded to an invitation to send greetings, preferably of 64 words; BAI's Chairman Gearoid Kilgallen contributed such a message, and a poem by another BAI member linked the date to the massacre of 8 August 1988, which had sparked the formation of her National League for Democracy (see inset). On the day itself BAI held a celebration between 6 and 8pm at Fusiliers Arch, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. At its close, 64 birthday balloons were released; many who attended had attached their own good wishes.

The ongoing U2 tour of European cities came to Dublin on 24, 25 and 27 July. As at the other venues, the show included the song 'Walk On' dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi, with a big-screen display which communicated some basic facts about Burma's recent history, and a line of democracy activists circled the stage, wearing face masks of the imprisoned Nobel Prizewinner. In Dublin this involved representatives of Amnesty International and twelve BAI members, who also manned a stand at each performance. At each, Croke Park packed in 80,000 people, a massive audience for the story of Burma's frustrated democracy. The

shows climaxed on the final night, when Bono announced to the fans - and the world - that Amnesty International had made its Ambassador of Conscience award for 2009 to Aung San Suu Kyi.

On 25 July, Ger Fitzgerald and six companions set out on a seven-day walk from Dublin's O'Connell Monument to its counterpart in Limerick. BAI members and supporters foregathered to see them off, and others accompanied them on their footsore and weary arrival. Collections in the course of their marathon raised €3,000 for refugee charities BAI supports, and later two Executive Committee members attended a meeting in Mullingar to receive a cheque for that sum. The outcome on 11 August of the protracted trial in Burma provoked worldwide demonstrations, in which BAI took part the following day. Assembling at 3.30pm at the Embassy of the USA, we marched to those of the UK, France and China, delivering messages of protest at each. On the 17th, BAI was invited to attend and speak at a ceremony at Dublin's City Hall; the Lord Mayor, Councillor Emer Costello, graciously opened a Book of Solidarity with Aung San Suu Kyi, on whom in 2000 the city had conferred its Freedom. And on 5 September several BAI members joined a sister organisation, the Burma Refugee Fund, to bag-pack from 10am to 7pm at Dunnes Cornelscourt store. Its customers' generosity raised over €2,000 to assist in the rebuilding of a school inside Burma, and to support Burmese refugees in Thailand and India.

## Regional Burma Action Ireland Groups

As BAI is based in Dublin, many of you find it difficult to attend BAI events, and regularly send messages of support. However, you also express your frustration at being unable to attend due to your location in the country.

I have been contacted by a BAI member living in the Limerick area who is interested in setting up a local BAI group in Limerick. I would envisage this group organising occasional public awareness events separate from or in conjunction with events held in Dublin. I also imagine that the active member who is interested in a local area group has some ideas also regarding the type of activities that could be planned.

As many of you have only provided e-mail addresses, I am unsure in which region of the country many of you are based, but if you are living in the Limerick area and are interested in becoming involved in a local area group in Limerick, please contact me at the e-mail address below.

There have been previous suggestions of local area groups in other regions such as Galway and Cork. If you are interested in becoming part of a local area group, please contact me and I will try to coordinate as many local area groupings as possible and put you in touch with other members in your area.

*Niamh Rooney, Co-ordinator, BAI.*

## To Suu Kyi on her 64th Birthday

*The square of eight: a date to celebrate!  
The eighth day of the eighth month, eighty-eight,  
though bathed in blood, led you to dedicate  
your life to changing your sad nation's fate.  
'They also serve who only stand and wait',  
and you, whom men have tried to isolate,  
don't stand alone; the world proclaims you great,  
and trusts you will rebuild your ravaged state.*



*Walkers receive a great send-off on July 25th.*

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**Burma Action Ireland is a voluntary group established since May 1996 to raise awareness in Ireland of the current situation in Burma and the nature of the ruling regime.**

Hon. President:  
John Boorman

Chairperson:  
Gearoid Kilgallen

