

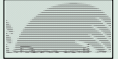


# Burma Action Ireland

Autumn 2004

## Newsletter

This publication is supported by donations and Ireland Aid funding through Development Cooperation Ireland



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# EU lets Burma into ASEM

Burma Action Ireland joined other European Burma solidarity groups in expressing its disappointment that the European Union agreed to the participation of Burma's dictators at the ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting) in Hanoi on 8 and 9 October. None of the minimum requirements set during the Irish Presidency, by the EU, for Burma's participation in ASEM have been met. Namely:

1. The release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and leaders of all political parties,
2. The National Convention\* procedures modified and a time frame established,
3. The National League for Democracy and other elected representatives allowed participate freely in the National Convention.

\*In May 2004, the Burmese military launched a 'National Convention' to discuss a roadmap for democracy. This Convention has not allowed genuine debate.

ASEM was formed in 1996 with the aim of strengthening relations between Europe and Asia. The ASEM meetings provide a forum for communication between the two continents. Though much of the

forum's early talks focused on economic cooperation and greater trade and investment opportunities, the meetings also deal with political and security concerns. Burma joins 12 other new nations to the organisation. The new 38-nation grouping comprises a market of 2.7 billion consumers - nearly half the world's population, and accounts for about 45% of the world's trade.

The EU had threatened to boycott the meeting if the regime's hardline military leaders, including General Than Shwe, attended the summit. Southeast Asian members in turn promised to retaliate by blocking the admission of the EU's 10 newest members. A last-minute compromise in which Burma agreed to send a lower-level delegation was reached last month, allowing the meeting to convene in October.

However, Asian leaders are expected to push for Burma's leader to be allowed to attend future Asia-Europe talks.

Aung San Suu Kyi's fellow Nobel Peace prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu accused world leaders of ignoring

oppression in Burma and her plight: "The words of protest at her detention from world leaders ring hollow when they do not translate into action," the South African anti-apartheid leader wrote in the *International Herald Tribune*. "There in Hanoi, state terrorists from Myanmar (Burma) will sit and dine with your leaders," he wrote.



Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi.

## Junta becomes even more hardline with PM sacking

**The Prime Minister of Burma, General Khin Nyunt, has been ousted and put under house arrest after a lengthy power struggle with other, more hardline members of Burma's military junta.** State television and radio of Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announced on 19 October that the Prime Minister had stepped down, after being "permitted to retire for health reasons", but no further information was forthcoming. He has been replaced by **Lieutenant General Soe Win.**

Khin Nyunt's removal is the biggest shake-up of Burma's political scene since 1992, when **General Than Shwe**, who is Head of the junta, ousted Saw Maung as Senior General. Khin Nyunt was number three in the military hierarchy behind Than Shwe and his deputy, Maung Aye, before becoming Prime Minister. He was considered to be one of the less unpleasant faces in the regime. Khin Nyunt it seems, was removed for corruption, but it has

more to do with the regime's internal politics and business interests.

Amid signs of disagreement within the high echelons of Burma's military hierarchy, a cabinet reshuffle on 18 September promoted so-called hardliners at the expense of others such as the Foreign Minister and his deputy Minister - U Win Aung and Deputy Minister U Khin Maung Win, (up to now the only two civilians in the regime) who, like Khin Nyunt, took a more open stance. Khin Nyunt was seen as favouring talks with pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Than Shwe remains strongly opposed to any role for the Nobel laureate.

"There has been a conflict between the army and the intelligence for some time," said **Aung Zaw**, the editor of *Irrawaddy*, a publication run by Burmese journalists in exile. According to Dr Aung Kin, a Burmese historian based in London, Khin Nyunt's fall from power could be related to Than Shwe's desire to secure his own future: "Now 71, General Than

Shwe is past the usual retirement age for Burmese generals, but has been worried about his safety if he left office", Dr Kin said. "Military uniform is very important in Burma" Dr Kin said, adding that without it, "Than Shwe would lose both his power and his security". Now it appears he has tried to solve that problem by purging those elements within military intelligence, which could threaten him. (Along with Khin Nyunt, scores of other military intelligence officials have reportedly been arrested). Dr Kin said that the military intelligence service often acted as a broker between the ruling junta and supporters of the opposition National League for Democracy.

To the outside world, Aung San Suu Kyi may be seen as a courageous figure, but to the junta she is the most dangerous person in the country. Several times over the past couple of years, the regime has hinted that it would free her, but she remains under house arrest. (cont. on page two)



# 1,300 POLITICAL PRISONERS PLUS IN BURMA

*"The release of political prisoners is the most important thing for all those who truly wish to bring about change in Burma",  
Aung San Suu Kyi.*

The United Nations took Burma to task on 28 September, over alleged human rights violations. This coincided with the release of a new UN report, which criticised Burma's military junta for jailing political dissidents, dozens of whom are in ailing health.

UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro told the UN General Assembly that he has received, "credible and detailed reports" of human rights violations in Burma, and noted that large numbers of people have received harsh jail sentences for political activities. "At least 50 political prisoners are currently in poor health," Pinheiro said in the report. Pinheiro has been prevented from entering Burma since November 2003, while Razali Ismail, the UN special envoy for the country, was last permitted to enter in March 2004.

There are in excess of **1,300 political prisoners** in Burma, including senior NLD politicians, General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi and Vice Chairman, Tin Oo. Daw Suu Kyi remains in detention since the Burmese military attacked her National League for Democracy (NLD) party convoy in northern Burma in May 2003 (see also front page article). Sports editor Zaw Thet Htwe and student leader Min Ko Naing are also being held as political prisoners.

Since that May 2003 crackdown, *Amnesty International* have documented the arrest of scores of NLD activists and supporters who are being kept at undisclosed detention centres and used on forced labour projects. The majority of prisoners are detained for 'anti-state' crimes relating to political organisation, peaceful protest and free expression. According to statistics provided by Thailand based *Assistance Association for*

*Political Prisoners* (AAPP), since 1988, more than 80 political prisoners have died as a result of torturous and inhumane treatments they endured in Burmese prisons.

Concern is mounting in particular for the condition of a number of the prisoners. Among them is Lin Lin Tun, currently in Mandalay prison as his health continues to deteriorate. He was detained in September 1998 and sentenced to 42 years in prison for allegedly distributing leaflets, having contacts with exiled opposition groups and breaking publishing laws. His father U Soe Myint, is serving a 28 year sentence.

67 year old Dr. Than Nyein, an elected MP from the NLD, was transferred from Thawaddy prison to Rangoon Hospital on 26 September. He has been on hunger strike since 19 September, to protest against a further six month extension of his prison term. Dr. Than Nyein and seven other NLD leaders were sentenced to seven years in prison in 1997 for helping Aung San Suu Kyi meet with the public.

The situation is dismal but there are ways in which you can help. The AAPP website, [www.aappb.net](http://www.aappb.net) provides a comprehensive resource, if you are interested in learning more about the current political prisoner situation in Burma and offers guidance on how you can help. BAI is currently planning their Prisoner of Conscience Campaign with the ultimate aim of contributing towards securing the release of all political prisoners in Burma. For further details and information on how you can become involved, please contact BAI. (Contact detail on back cover).

You can also write appeals to the State Peace and Development Council (the Burmese military regime) calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners immediately and unconditionally. Appeals should refer in particular to the 30 May crackdown of 2003. (See back page for SPDC contact address).

## Ambassador plans on hold

Ireland has put on hold plans to exchange ambassadors with Burma as a result of the lack of political progress. As reported earlier this year by BAI, Ireland established diplomatic relations with Burma's military junta in February and the Irish ambassador to Malaysia was to have been accredited there on a non-resident basis. BAI expressed strong reservations at the time that Ireland's gesture was likely to be perceived by the military as an endorsement - further entrenching rather than softening their position.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, **Mr Dermot Ahern**, TD has said, in a written response to a recent parliamentary question that: "It is very much to be regretted that the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other positive developments which were widely expected to take place in Burma earlier this year, were not forthcoming".

## Junta becomes even more hardline with PM sacking *(cont. from page one)*

The last time she was allowed out, she drew such crowds that the junta began to fear for its future, and in May 2003 a convoy in which she was travelling, was attacked at Depayin, killing many of her supporters. This attack has resulted in the latest period of her detention. The new Prime Minister Lieutenant General Soe Win is likely to come down hard on any dissent following Khin Nyunt's removal. There are fears that the latest upheaval could lead to renewed fighting among ethnic groups and the military in Burma. There are also concerns over worsening repression, including the safety of Daw Suu Kyi - the new Prime Minister is believed to have orchestrated that 2003 attack in the Depayin.

Sunday 24 October 2004 marked a total of nine years in detention for Aung San Suu Kyi. She was first placed in detention on 20 July 1989. The calculation covers her three periods of house arrest and excludes the times during which she was 'free'.

## Euro Burma Network - three priorities agreed

Representatives of Burma Action Ireland attended a meeting of the Euro Burma Network (EBN) in Amsterdam from 10 -12 September. The Network is made up of a number of European based Burmese solidarity groups.

Three priorities were agreed for co-ordinated EBN lobby activity over the next six months. These priorities include the strengthening of the EU Common Position, pressure for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the situation in Burma to be put on the UN Security Council agenda.



Sting, a contributor to *For the Lady* album.

## Military bans "For the Lady" album

Burma's military junta has banned an album by some of the world's top musicians. The album, featuring 27 tracks on double CD aims to benefit the *US Campaign for Burma* and demands freedom for Aung San Suu Kyi.

Bands U2, Pearl Jam, Coldplay, Sting, R.E.M., Travis, Indigo Girls and Matchbox Twenty, and several other artists including Paul McCartney and Eric Clapton launched "For the Lady" on 26 October (in the USA and Canada). "The fact that Burma's dictators are threatened by songs from Paul McCartney, Eric Clapton, Sting, and others, shows how weak they truly are," said Jeremy Woodrum, founder of non-profit group *US Campaign For Burma*. "Just as rock 'n roll helped tear down the Iron Curtain, it can help bring freedom to Burma," he said. The border guards of the Burmese junta have been ordered to carry out thorough searches on people coming into the country and confiscate the album. Singing a freedom-seeking song in Burma can result in a minimum seven-year prison sentence. A European date for the launch of the album has yet to be agreed.

# Update on Burma

## NLD MARKS ANNIVERSARY WITH DEMONSTRATION

In a rare act of defiance, members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) marched from their headquarters to the offices of the United Nations Development Programme on 28 September to ask for help in freeing Aun San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. The demonstrators submitted a letter to the UN office with three requests: (i) help for protesters staging hunger strikes in front of the UN HQ, New York, (ii) a request that the UN comes to the aid of 30 people arrested at a protest in Thailand, and (iii) asking the UN to recognise the results of the 1990 elections that the NLD won by a landslide.

## US UNIVERSITIES CANCEL TOURS TO BURMA

Over the last two months, seven US academic institutions have cancelled planned trips to Burma. The institutions are the Smithsonian Institute, Asia Society, American Museum of Natural History, the University of Washington, Stanford University, the Wright Institute of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin.

The cancellations took place as the United States Senate passed a unanimous resolution calling on the UN Security Council to address the situation in Burma, and as seven Burmese dissidents in exile launched a hunger strike in front of the UN building, demanding Security Council action (see article above).

Group tourist travel and tourism in general in Burma, is linked to human rights abuses and benefits Burma's military regime in a number of ways. Firstly, the regime uses forced labour to develop its tourist infrastructure. The *International Labour Organisation* reports that: "The military treats the civilian population as an unlimited pool of unpaid forced labourers and servants at their disposal. The practice of forced labour is to encourage private investment in infrastructure development, public sector works and tourism projects." As a result of the military regime's use of forced labour, the ILO has called for international sanctions on Burma, the first time the organisation has taken such action in its 80-year history. In addition, thousands

of Burmese people have been forced from their homes to make way for tourism developments or so-called 'beautification projects'. These people are usually left without homes or shelter, so that tourists can enjoy the areas where they used to live.

## THAI-BURMA ELEPHANT POACHING



Burmese elephant calves are being hunted in forests in Burma.

According to the *Asian Conservation Alliance Task Force* (ACATF), a coalition of non-government groups, the future is bleak for Burma's endangered elephant species. Thai poachers are expanding their network and are capturing dozens of endangered wild baby elephants in Laos and Burma each year to feed growing demand from circuses, zoos and travelling shows. Speaking on the radio station – the Democratic Voice of Burma, the ACATF revealed that approximately 60 baby elephants are captured from forests each year in Thailand and the two neighbouring states, eventually to be sold off to merchants - mainly in China.

Thailand is currently home to 1,500 to 2,000 wild elephants, while Burma claims about 4,000. The Burmese elephant is internationally endangered and is regarded as a worldwide flagship species. This supports a claim by the *Wildlife Fund Thailand*, who said that evidence exists to show how elephant calves have been hunted from forests in Thailand, Laos and Burma. Cross border smuggling is made possible because of corruption at checkpoints in Thailand. The ACATF coalition has called for an immediate halt to the trade.



## BAI Book Review: From the Land of Green Ghosts

*Title:* FROM THE LAND OF GREEN GHOSTS  
*Author:* PASCAL KHOO THWE  
*Publishers:* Imprint of Harper Collins, 77-85 Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, LONDON W6 8JB  
*Published by:* FLAMINGO 2003: 987654  
 First published in Great Britain by Harper Collins 2002

### From the Land of Green Ghosts

PASCAL KHOO THWE was born in 1967 in a remote part of Burma's Shan State. In 1989 he came to England and studied English at Cambridge University. He now lives in London. 'FROM THE LAND OF GREEN GHOSTS' was the winner of the 2002 Kiriama Prize for non-fiction.

This book is a thrilling and gripping autobiography of a young man, a Padaung, from the Shan State in Burma. In it, he recounts memories of his early childhood and boyhood, sharing his appreciation of the tribal culture and customs of his native homeland. He was encouraged by his teacher to study English and this brought him to the University of Mandalay. He, like all students of ethnic background, was very poor; he studied diligently and supported himself by working at night. A chance meeting with Dr. John Casey, a Cambridge don visiting Mandalay would later change the course of his life.

After the 'bloody' events of March and June in Rangoon in 1988, Pascal Khoo Thwe and other students were forced to leave Mandalay and flee for their lives. He joined the 'rebels' on the Burma/Thai Border and fought with them against the Burmese army. His description of this period of his life shows his courage and determination to fight for justice and for the human rights of his people who had been suffering under the tyranny of the corrupt military dictatorship for nearly 40 years.

Through his continued contact with Dr. Casey, he escaped into Thailand, and eventually arrived in Cambridge where he continued his English studies. He was determined to succeed in order to help his people as an exile.

This book is a remarkable example of what one person can do to serve his country. Pascal Khoo Thwe's fluency and easy style are remarkable for a young man who is writing in English as his second language. For anyone who has followed events in Burma and is aware of the brutality of the present military regime, reading this autobiography is a must. Having begun to read it, one is compelled to continue reading to the final page.

### Membership

Membership letters are enclosed in this edition of the newsletter. BAI is always looking for people to volunteer and help in all kinds of ways.

We appreciate that you may be busy, but if you do have some free time, we would be delighted to have your assistance. Please fill out the form and send it back to us. If you have questions about becoming more active in BAI, please contact us (number given at the end of this page).

## Living Asia Hero

In a recent online poll, Aung San Suu Kyi was elected Time Magazine's online *living Asian hero* - "for her steadiness and her steadfast belief in the powers of democracy and peaceful protest". Aung San Suu Kyi was selected as one of 20 nominees for the award and received 40.4% of the vote by online viewers (37,617 votes out of a total of 93,022 votes cast). She faced some tough opposition in the poll with the Dalai Lama and others, such as the political prisoner turned President, Kim Dae Jung (Korea) featuring in the ballot. BAI hope that the exposure on such a high profile web-site will help to highlight Aung San Suu Kyi's on-going detention.

Here are the full voting results:

|                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Aung San Suu Kyi | 40.4%   37,617 votes |
| Anwar Ibrahim    | 35.9%   33,379 votes |
| Dalai Lama       | 20.3%   18,879 votes |

## What can you do?

In addition to volunteering to help BAI carry out its work (see notice about Membership above), there are many ways you can help highlight the situation in Burma. You could consider undertaking some of the activities outlined below:

### Politicians

Write to the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dermot Ahern, TD (Iveagh House, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2), your local TD and/MEP to let them know of your concern for human rights in Burma. Urge them to raise the Burma issue at every level of the political process and:

- Take all necessary measures toward a speedy restoration of democracy in Burma,
- Demand the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all other activists arrested on 30 May 2003,

- Persuade UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to raise support for a UN Security Council resolution on Burma that supports an inclusive process of national reconciliation.

### Regarding the central issue of the oppression of the Burmese people

Write appeals to the State Peace and Development Council (the Burmese military regime), calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all Burmese political prisoners. The article about the 1,300 political prisoners on page two, should be useful to you in this regard.

In your letter, please ask the State Peace and Development Council to do the following:

- To immediately implement a nationwide ceasefire to stop increased militarisation and anti-insurgency campaigns in the ethnic states,
- To allow representatives of the non-Burman ethnic nationalities to participate in talks with Daw Suu Kyi, which would facilitate broad-based and inclusive national reconciliation and

the restoration of democracy,

- 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 and unhindered access to assist their return and reintegration.

Please address your action letters to the following:

Lieutenant General Soe Win  
 Prime Minister,  
 State Peace and Development Council  
 Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road  
 Dagon Post Office, Yangon  
 Union of Myanmar.

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The mailing of this newsletter is courtesy of Senator Brendan Ryan and Senator Paschal Mooney

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.

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