

## Introduction

To survive, one needs mental power. It can bring not only physical changes but also great achievements. We can say that it controls a Man's vice and virtue. Without mental power, the ability to survive under harsh conditions can be seriously affected. However, with mental power, Man can overcome all kinds of difficulties. This mental power can have an effect many times stronger than even nuclear power.

Thousands of political prisoners have been in prisons in Burma - which has gone from being a developing country to one of the least developed countries, through misrule by the authorities. They are put in prison for their beliefs and activities supporting democracy in their country. The last 13 years have been the toughest since the first military coup in 1962 when political activities were totally prohibited .

The current military regime has been ruling in numerous cruel ways after the crack down on the peoples' uprising in 1988. They have neglected the desires of the people as they seem intent on holding power. The people are living in constant danger under this kind of rule and can be arrested and imprisoned any time they criticize the authorities. It's obvious that activists face terrible conditions purely for their beliefs and actions.

From 1988 until now, activists, both young and old, have been in prisons without basic human rights. Among them are students, intellectuals, civil servants, religious leaders and so on. They have buried their futures under the repressive conditions of prison. It is unbelievable that activists, who simply want the country to improve, are being suppressed while the authorities talk about the development of the country and national reconciliation.

While the Junta has been struggling to stay in power, activists have expressed their beliefs despite fear of Military Intelligence. At the same time, they have suffered mental and physical torture, and some have even died on the way to this common goal of democracy and Human Rights. However, the rest of the activists still continue the movement while carrying the courage of their fellow activists who have died in prison.

Their main strength lies in the conviction that Burma will one day have democracy and Human Rights. This mental power is the driving force for their survival and continued activities in accordance with their beliefs.

The articles in this book are true stories about life under Burmese military rule. The writers mention their experiences of the terrible system they had faced. It is true that this book contains misery, surprise, strength, sorrow and terrible conditions. This collection of articles is trying to shed light on a wide dark room using only a small torch. Therefore, it cannot express the entire mistreatment of the people. In other words, it's only a sentence in the book called "the military dictatorship."

# **TorturedVoices**

Personal Accounts of Burma's Interrogation Centres  
All Burma Students' Democratic Front

Tortured Voces  
Personal Accounts of Burma's Interrogation Centres

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For all political prisoners in Burma  
Who have suffered at military Interrogation Centres  
And survived to continue the struggle for democracy

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## Acronyms, Terms and Abbreviations

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| ABSDF           | All Burma Basic Education Students' Union    |
| ABFSU           | All Burma Federation of Student Unions       |
| ABSDF           | All Burma Student's Democratic Front         |
| a.k.a           | also known as                                |
| BSPP            | Burma Socialist Programme Party              |
| CIA             | Central Intelligence Agency                  |
| CPB             | Communist Party of Burma                     |
| DDSI            | Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence |
| KNU             | Karen National Union                         |
| <i>Kyat</i>     | Burmese currency                             |
| LORC            | Law and Order Restoration Council            |
| MIS             | Military Intelligence Service                |
| MI-7            | Military Intelligence Service Unit7          |
| NIB             | National Intelligence Bureau                 |
| NLD             | Natioal Leagur for Democracy                 |
| RIT             | Rangoon Institute of Technology              |
| SLORC           | State Law and Order Restoration Council      |
| SPDC            | State Peace and Development Council          |
| <i>Tatmadaw</i> | Armed forces                                 |

## Acknowledgements

The ABSDF would firstly like to sincerely thank the nine contributors to this book for providing their personal stories for publication.

We would also like to express our appreciation to all those friends and colleagues who assisted in translating the accounts. In particular, we would like to thank Naing Luu Aung, Moe Aye, Soe Aung, Zaw Min and Toe Zaw Latt, as well as Aung Moe Htat who edited the publication.

## Introduction

The personal accounts of the nine former Burmese political prisoners in this book reflect the strength and courage of those involved in the pro-democracy movement in Burma. The testimonies are honest and harrowing accounts of what occurs inside Burma's military Interrogation Centers and reveal the perverted mentality of the brutal and paranoid military state that rules Burma.

The contributors to this book were detained, interrogated and tortured by Burma's Military Intelligence Service (MIS) for their belief in democracy and universal human rights. Their accounts of what happened to them immediately after arrest show the cruel and barbaric lengths to which the Burmese military is prepared to go to extract information and false confessions from opposition supporters.

Most of the former political prisoners in this book were detained form their involvement in student unions, while others were held for being involved in peaceful demonstrations or for their association with National League for Democracy (NLD).

Each author tells a remarkably similar story of how he or she was blindfolded and handcuffed when arrested, and then brutally interrogated and tortured at an MIS Interrogation Centre before being forced to sign a 'confession.'

The authors cite many similar methods of torture used by the MIS. They include beatings, abuse, threats of death and rape, electrocution, sleep deprivation, forcing people to stand or squat in uncomfortable positions for long periods such as in the 'motorbike' position, rolling iron or bamboo rods along a person's shins, pouring water over a person's head covered in plastic, denial of food and water, denial of medical treatment, forcing people to kneel on sharp stones and hanging by the arms and feet.

Following their interrogation and torture by the MIS, all the contributors to this book were summarily tried and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. They were not allowed access to legal counsel and in many cases were not even told what they had been charged with.

All but one were sent to the notorious Insein Prison in Rangoon, where most political prisoners in Burma are sent at some time. The prison is infamous for torture and cruelty to political prisoners and its appalling conditions. After their release from prison, most of the authors eventually fled Burma to the relative safety of the Thai-Burma border and currently live in exile. A short biography of each author precedes his or her personal account.

One former political prisoner, Moe Aye, has contributed an account of the last days of Mr. James Lesander Nichols, who died in the custody of the MIS in June 1996. Mr. Nichols was the honorary consul to Denmark, Norway, Finland and Switzerland when he died during his incarceration at Insein Special Prison. Moe Aye was a prisoner at Insein at the same time as Mr. Nichols. Moe Aye saw him arrive at the prison, watched his condition deteriorate as a result of the constant interrogation sessions, and was there when the MIS took Mr. Nichols away for the last time.

Moe Aye's account of Mr. Nichols' last days has attracted substantial international interest, particularly in Scandinavian countries. The account is to be used as evidence in a lawsuit that Mr. Nichols' son, Bill Nichols, is expected to bring against the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), formerly known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

Throughout Burma some 20 primary detention centres have been identified where brutal interrogations and torture takes place. These centres include the notorious Ye Kyi Aing complex outside Rangoon, and centres in Rangoon and seven other divisions and states across the country. The MIS relies on thousands of agents and informers to carry out surveillance not only on political dissidents, students and members of the public, but also members of the armed forces, expatriates and foreigners abroad who are actively involved in Burma's pro-democracy movement.

The National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) oversees all of Burma's intelligence agencies and is under the direct control of the SPDC.

Under this national bureau is the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence Service. The MIS was established in 1958 and throughout the Revolutionary Council and Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) periods from 1962-1988, it became the means by which the regime eliminated opposition to military rule.

Even greater reliance was placed on the country's military intelligence apparatus under the SLORC. And resources to the MIS have subsequently increased. Since 1988 there have been reports that a number of countries have provided training and assistance to Burma's intelligence services. China has reportedly provided technical equipment and training, Singapore is thought to be training members of Burma's 'secret police', and Israel's intelligence agency Mossad is rumoured to also have provided training and assistance to Burma's intelligence services. China has reportedly provided technical equipment and training, Singapore is thought to be

training members of Burma's 'secret police', and Israel's intelligence agency Mossad is rumoured to also have provided training.

Under the SLORC, which renamed itself the State Peace and Development for most of the reported arrests and investigations of political suspects. It has also often been accused of brutality and using torture as part of its interrogations. The units most often cited by human rights groups as carrying out gross human rights abuses have been Military Intelligence Service Unit 6 (MI-6), MI-7 and MI-14, all based in Rangoon, and MI-16 in Mandalay.

The MIS uses both physical and psychological methods of torture. When political prisoners arrive at an interrogation centre, the MIS first breaks down their confidence and morale. The prisoners are treated like animals and made to believe that they have no alternative but to confess what they know. They are also not allowed to sleep from between three to seven days, and are usually not fed for three days or given any water for two days.

Prisoners are also made to experience fear through various methods of torture. This includes blindfolding prisoners or placing hoods over their heads, and using fake screams from nearby rooms. Most prisoners admit they experience more fear at MIS interrogation centres than during the beatings and torture in prison.

One method used by the MIS to instil fear into prisoners is by playing upon phobias. For instance, when the MIS interrogated a highly respected businessman in his 60s, they knew that he was afraid of snakes. They consequently forced him into a pit of snakes and he later recalled he was absolutely terrified. A leader of the All Burma Basic Education Student Union (ABBESU), Ye Maw Htoo, also suffers from a phobia of snakes. During his interrogation the MIS told him to remove a hood that had been placed over his head. To his terror he saw a snake moving towards his legs preparing to bite him and he passed out.

The MIS would also tell a blindfolded prisoner to press a button and not release it, and then tell the prisoner that he's holding a bomb. The MIS would tell prisoner that if he released the button the bomb would explode. They would then leave the room. After hours of pressing the button the prisoner's hands would shake, but he would dare not release the button. Eventually, when the prisoner couldn't hold the button down anymore, he would be forced to release it no matter what the consequences. However, there was never any bomb. It was just way to instil fear in prisoners. This method of torture was used on Nyi Nyi Htun, a member of the NLD Youth in Tanyin Township in Rangoon. He was forced to the bombing of the Tanyin Oil Refinery compound in 1989, although he had nothing to do with the incident. He was subsequently given the death penalty and he remains in Insein Prison.

In July 1989, the SLORC cracked down on suspected members of the underground network of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). There were 107 arrests in all, and the MIS selected a group of four of them, shaved their heads, and forced them into pits in the ground. They were buried up to their necks with only their heads above ground. They had read about this torture in books and thought that the MIS would pour honey over their heads and release red ants on them. However, a group of soldiers arrived instead and began to kick their heads with their heavy combat boots.

Former prisoners tell of many other forms of torture. The well-known and respected general secretary of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), U Hla Shwe, who is in his 50s, recalled that he was forced to stand on his toes for hours during an interrogation. Sharp pins were placed under his heels and eventually when he couldn't stand on his toes any longer, he was forced to step down onto the pins. One prisoner who was arrested for having alleged connections with the Karen National Union (KNU) was tortured in yet another way. The MIS pulled a soft plastic bag over his head and then kept pouring water over him. He said it felt like a bomb was exploding on his head, and that his head was breaking into pieces and his ears were being blown off.

Electrocution is another method of torture frequently used by the MIS. One of the leaders of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), Myint San, was

told to press a button during his interrogation. Since he had a hood over his head he couldn't see what it was. As he pressed the button he received a series of electric shocks and his body twitched and shook all over. Some prisoners would ask the MIS to make a phone call. A device, which looked like a headset, would then be fastened over the prisoner's head and a series of electric shocks would be delivered to him. According to these prisoners, the torture felt like a pointed iron rod was being driven through one's ear.

People arrested by the Military Intelligence Service are forced to call their friends to arrange a meeting so the MIS can arrest more people. These arrests can happen in broad daylight. Sometimes the wives of suspects are also arrested, beaten and interrogated, and newborn babies or infants are taken while their parents are being interrogated. Under such conditions a political activist is forced to turn himself in and can't run away for fear of reprisals against his wife, his parents, or his brothers and sisters. For this reason, many people don't run away even if they are warned that a government crackdown is imminent.

Prisoners are persuaded through various means to believe that their friends have already confessed to certain things, and that they can therefore tell their interrogators what they know about their friends. For instance, the MIS makes a prisoner believe that his friend, who was probably arrested along with him, has told them everything by making up stories from certain bits of information. This has an effect even on the most resolute. Prisoners then believe that their friends have become traitors and they are likely to confess all of what they know.

In order to break down a prisoner's confidence the MIS is also likely to tell the prisoner that they know all about him, using bits of information from other prisoners and forcing him to confess to his supposed crimes. Psychological torture is used in the latter days of the interrogation process. When a prisoner is in bad shape from physical torture, the MIS switches to using more psychological techniques so that the prisoner will not lose consciousness. The MIS avoids letting a prisoner lose consciousness because he or she is then not able to answer any questions and will have to be sent out for medical treatment.

Many of these interrogation techniques and methods of torture are mentioned in the personal accounts in this book. Over the past 35 years of military rule in Burma, tens of thousands of people opposed to the military's iron-rule have been detained, interrogated and tortured by the intelligence agencies. There are currently up to 2'000 political prisoners in Burma, all of whom would have been interrogated by the MIS upon their arrest and all of whom would have their own stories of torture and suffering to tell.

#### *Endnotes*

'National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. (NCGUB), Burma Year Book-1996, page 244.

See Selth, A, Burma's Intelligence Apparatus, Working Paper No.308, June 1997, Australian National University Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

## **No Escape**

By Phone Myint Tun

### **About the Author**

Phone Myint Tun was born in 1969 in Pabedan Township, Rangoon. In August 1988 during the pro-democracy uprising, he joined the Tri-Colour Student Group, which was responsible for the security of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In 1989 he joined the southern branch of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).

He was arrested in January 1991 by Military Intelligence Unit 7 and released from prison four years later on February 1, 1995. In October the same year he left for Japan and three months later returned to Burma and discussed with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi the establishment of a group to help political prisoners. In November 1995 he successfully smuggled out documents from political prisoners in Insein Special Prison which were then passed on to United Nations representatives.

Phone Myint Tun was then tipped off that Military Intelligence officers were about to arrest him, and in January 1996 he fled Burma for Japan where he currently lives in exile with his mother and sister.

His father, U Tin Tun, was arrested in August 1993 and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for Possession of the pro-democracy newspaper 'New Era Journal'. He remains in Thawaddy Prison, north of Rangoon.

I remember it was the night of January 14, 1991, the day the US-led allies sent an ultimatum to Iraq. I had watched Burmese television showing satellite pictures of Iraq launching scud missiles into Israel at a friend's house on Barr Street. The curfew in Rangoon was still in force, although it now didn't begin until 11pm. Knowing too well the penalty one could receive for violating this law, I returned home. I knew some of them so I decided to join them for a few minutes for a song. That night I remember I sang Htoo Ein Thin's 'My Mother's house'.

When I walked into the lane where I lived with my parents, I saw a man near our home. I could see him clearly under the street light. The street was deserted although the curfew was still two hours away. The stranger was sitting on a concrete platform by the roadside and he was carrying a school shoulder bag, which was not unusual for a Burmese. I had never seen him before and with him on my mind, I entered my home. I had my supper, said good night to my parents and my niece, and went to bed. While falling asleep the stranger on the pavement lingered in my mind. The sound of car engines woke me up. I guessed it might have been past midnight. The noise of the engines was so loud that it would have woken up the whole neighbourhood. Ours is usually a quiet street.

Suddenly I heard someone knocking quickly on the front door accompanied by shout. 'Open up! We want to check the guest list!'

I heard my father open the door and invite them in. 'Where are the ward officials?' asked my father, who was expecting to see members of the local Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC).

'We're from the Military Intelligence Service,' one of them told my father. 'I'm captain Therin Zaw Myint. Is Phone Myint Tun in?' asked the captain who was average height but slightly overweight.

'Yes. What brings you here?' my father replied.

'We want to ask a few questions about a friend of his.'

I came down from the attic where I slept. 'I'm Phone Myint Tun,' I said. "Why are you here?'

'We want to ask you a few questions. We'll send you home afterwards,' the captain said.' And bring a jumper,' he added.

In that instant I knew that something had gone seriously wrong. I took the jumper that my father handed to me and told him not to worry.

We walked out of the house and to my amazement one of them turned to me and said, 'You're fucking talkative! We'll see how talkative you are when we get there!'

I saw a TE-11 military truck and a military pick-up truck parked near our house. Before I could say anything I was blindfolded and I felt something like the barrel of a gun being prodded into my back. I was then forced into one of the trucks.

The whole incident took only a few minutes but, as I had guessed, the commotion had woken our neighbours. I gathered that people from the neighbouring houses must have been watching us for I heard the captain shouting at them, 'Get back into your houses! This is none of your fucking business!'

Once in the truck, I sensed that there were about four or five other people there.

'You must not talk among yourselves. Is that clear?' ordered the captain.

'Yes,' We all replied.

I later learned that my fellow passengers were Aung Kyaw Myint, Phyo Min Thein (a.k.a. Ko Phyo), Saw Sanda New and Than Than Htay. What felt like half an hour later, the truck stopped and we were ordered to get out. However, we couldn't see anything since we were all still blindfolded and we had to grope about to find our way.

'Why the fuck are you walking like blind people?' someone shouted.

We were then beaten for the first time and I could hear the cries of my fellow detainees. Shortly afterwards we were taken to a building. We were told to jump over something, bend down as if avoiding something overhead, and to walk on all fours. I gathered that we were being told to do these things so we couldn't retrace our steps. This was followed by seemingly normal routines of measuring our height, taking our photos and conducting body searches. When they took my picture they took off the blindfold, but because the light shone directly in my eyes I couldn't see who was behind the camera. The blindfold was then replaced before they measured my height. My jacket was confiscated and I was left with only my sports shirt.

Afterwards, two Military Intelligence Service(MIS) guards threw me into a cell measuring about six feet square. In the cell was a makeshift bed, a table, a chair and a neon light. About 15 minutes later, I heard someone writing on the door of my cell with chalk. 'They're writing my name,' I thought to myself.

I was blindfolded the whole time I was in the Interrogation Centre. The actual interrogations came at night and they started the day I was arrested, but sometimes I was also interrogated during the day. I knew when it was night because I could hear the children of the officers and guards learning their lessons in the soldiers' quarters.

Shortly after I was thrown into my cell, I heard the footsteps of someone approaching. The door opened and a man walked in. I later learned that he was the one who interrogated me throughout my time at the MIS Centre. His name was Sergeant Major Maung Thein and his voice was deep and hoarse. Although I never saw him, he smoked cheroots all the time and would usually be eating a snack. Once I caught a glimpse of his forearm on which there was a tattoo of a knife through a star. He told me to stand up and began to ask me questions about myself. Then he asked

me how I got involved in the demonstrations. I thought I gave them quite detailed answers. He then asked, 'Do you know Shwe Htee?'

'I don't know him,' I replied.

'You are lying. You must know him.'

'I have no idea who he is.'

This went on for a while and then I heard two people enter the room. 'This one's for you, mother fucker,' the sergeant major said, 'because you say you don't know Shwe Htee.' With that he left the room.

I felt perplexed. What did he mean by that? Whack! Suddenly someone hit me in the face. Then another men started beating me up and I dropped to the floor. They kicked me with their combat boots for about half an hour. As soon as they left, I heard a familiar voice.

'Do you know Shwe Htee?' Sergeant Major Maung Thein was back in the room.

'I don't know him. I told you already.'

'You've met him so you mut know him.'

'Okay, I'll show you who's mistaken.'

I heard him walk out of the room again. Other footsteps approached but I had no idea if they belonged to one of the two men who had just beaten me up. I was ordered ot do sit-ups, and about an hour later I dopped to the floor from exhaustion. In on time, the man began to hit me with a stick that he must have had since he came in. He kept hitting me and I had to cover my head with my hands to protect me. The stick was so rough that it gashed my hands.

Sergeant Major Maung Thein came back. 'You can choose to answer the questions correctly or be beaten like this,' he said. 'It something, U Maung Ko died of torture. You don't want to die, do you? Now, standin the *Ki* position and we will see if you obey orders. Do what you are told, mothe fucker!'

The door banged shut behind him. I then stood in the *Ki* position with my legs apart and bent, and with my fists clenched at my waist with my elbows behind my. A while later, I stood up to stretch out because my body was stiff and began to ache. Just then the Sergeant Major came back in.

'You are not dong what you were ordered to do, you son of a bitch!' and as he spoke I was beaten again.

Two days after my arrest I heard someone being questioned in the cell next to mine. It turned out to be Daw Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein. She seemed ot have two interrogators in her cell. They were ordering her to answer different questions at the same time and I thought they were trying to trap her with her answers. I could also hear a woman crying in another room and I thought it was Saw Sanda New. They were torturing her. I also heard the sounds of beatings and the voice of Than Than Htay. I could also hear Ko Phyo (a.k.a. Phyo Min Thein) being questioned and beaten, and the soft cries of Aung Kyaw Myint. I found out much later that Aung Kyaw Myint. I found out much later that Aung Kyaw Myint was sick at the time of his arrest and interrogation.

I experienced more beatings two days after my arrest. Blindfolded, my world was totally dominated by sounds. My heart was now in the habit of skipping a beat at the sound of the door opening, and the sound of footsteps was now traumatic. The sounds of birds chirping signalled the arrival of dawn, while the sounds of children studying out loud and the bell of the neighbourhood fire watch told me of the darkness. One night three days after my arrest I heard the sound of a loudspeaker reminding residents of a Buddhist procession. The announcement began with 'The friends of Dhama who live on Manawhari Road', and the voice echoed through the night. It was only then I realised that I was at Military Intelligence Unit (MI-7) headquarters, which is located on Manwhari Road in Rangoon.

Before my arrest former political prisoners who had been through MIS Interrogation Centres had briefed me. They told my that the best way to avoid giving

crucial information about the movement was to keep telling them the same answers. Although it was somehow effective, I realised later that it was costly. Whenever the MIS felt they didn't get a satisfactory response, they would force me to either sit in the *Ki* position, do sit-ups continuously or squat in the position of piloting an aircraft. They would also beat and kick me whenever they felt like it. I remember that when I was ordered to squat and pilot stretching out my arms as if they were wings. I was also left without food or water.

Finally, after many sessions of torture, I was told I could sleep. I hadn't slept for three nights, had been deprived of food and water and had endured incessant torture. I was overjoyed at the prospect of getting some rest and I took it as a good sign. I fell asleep almost immediately. However, no sooner had I fallen asleep, I was woken up with a sharp kick to my right ribs. 'Do you know Shwe Htee? Someone demanded.

'I don't know who he is,' I replied, dazed but fully aware of what was going on.

'We have a photo of you two together which proves that you know him.'

I asked them to bring the photo to prove they weren't making it up. They took off my blindfold and showed me a photo which turned out to be the one found in Nay Lin's school bag when he was detained. It was taken on U Pein Bridge.

'This isn't Shwe Htee, this is Than Win,' I said. My response angered them and I was once again slapped hard across my face.

When they left another man came in. It had already been three days since I was arrested and they hadn't given me any water or food. I asked him for some water.

'If you want to drink some water, you'll have to ride a bicycle to get it,' he said matter-of-factly.

'What?' I had no idea what he was talking about.

'The water is in Pegu so you'll have to ride there to get it.'

I then knew what I must do now for a cup of water. I began to pretend to ride a bike as instructed—a bike journey from Rangoon to Pegu to quench my thirst. A few moments later, he asked where I was now.

'Minglalon,' I replied, a town about 20 kilometres from Rangoon.

'You liar! The bike's not that fast!' He hit me with his baton and I blanked out for a moment. I then had to ride the bike starting again from Rangoon. The thirst was driving me crazy and I couldn't go on anymore.

'I'm so thirsty. Give me some water,' I almost pleaded with him.

'Okay. The water pot is right beside you. Show me how you drink the water.'

Again I had to act out an imaginary situation. Now I was pretending to scoop water from a pot while riding the imaginary bike. I felt there was probably no way I could satisfy him. I must have spent half the day pretending to ride the bike and trying to drink water from the imaginary pot. Only when my body was soaked with sweat and I couldn't go on any longer was I told to stop.

Eventually I realised that they wouldn't give me anything unless I told them all I knew about my involvement in the movement. So I decided to try something else.

'I want to go to toilet,' I ventured.

'No. Don't even think about it.'

'If you don't let me go I'll do it here,' I said, sounding as though I really meant it.

Only then was I taken to the toilet. Since I was still blindfolded, I couldn't see anything along the way and I tripped over something. I was unable to get up immediately so the guard kicked me with his boots to get me up.

'Don't bolt the door,' he warned before I went into the toilet.

I locked the door securely despite the warning. I couldn't stand it anymore. I quickly drank the water from the water pot in the toilet. I was so thirsty and drinking so hurriedly that I mistakenly scraped the water scoop on the bottom of the pot.

' You mother fucker!' The guard now knew what I was doing in the toilet. 'You're drinking the water in the toilet!' he yelled, pounding the door. 'Son of a bitch! Open up! Open up!'

I opened the door and pictured the angry face of my torturer, Sergeant Major Maung Thein. The guard grabbed me by my neck, pulled me up and punched me countless times on my face. I understood then what price you could pay for a cup of water in a situation like this. The angry face dragged me back to the cell and threw me in. The guard continued to beat me with a baton.

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Next was the turn of the Sergeant Major. This time he wanted to know more about what I did from the very beginning. 'Now tell me what you have done since 1988. Don't lie to us. If you do, we'll catch you out because we have everything on record about you.'

I told him a lot of things, except important matters regarding my movements.

'Now tell me who you have worked with.'

I told him the names of my comrades who had already been in prison. Unfortunately, I was only able to come up with five other names.

' Only six of you in total? You lying bastard!'

'Yes, only six of us,' I said.

'You don't want to get hurt, do you mother fucker? Isn't there anyone else besides the six of you?'

'No. Only six of us.'

That did it. He left the room and I knew what was coming.

I heard two men come in and without warning they began to hit me all over with heavy wooden sticks. They stopped only when I couldn't resist any longer and fell to the floor. Then I must have fainted as I have no clear recollection of what happened after that.

On the fourth day of my detention, I was given some water in a beer can. I drank it like a mad man. But as I was gulping down the water I suddenly stopped. I had a thought that frightened me for a moment. 'What have they put in the water? Is this pure water?' I had heard stories about political prisoners being given poisonous water while under interrogation. However, I was so thirsty and I thought that since I had drunk some already it now didn't make any difference, so I drank it all.

In what I think was the afternoon, a guard came into the cell. He gave me a plate and I realised that I'd be getting my first meal in four days. The guard asked me to lift up the blindfold so I could see the food. I held the plate in one hand and removed the blindfold. Suddenly, I dropped the plate in fright—there was the head of a big snake on the plate with a lump of rice! I then quickly realised that it was actually the head of a fish very much like that of a snake. However it was too late as I had committed a crime. The fish head and rice were all over the floor.

'You idiot! You've thrown away your food!' the guard shouted.

I was beaten again. At this stage I didn't feel any pain because I was numb from all the other beatings. Afterwards I picked up some of the rice and ate it with the fish head. I couldn't finish the whole meal and left a bit on the floor, even though I knew this was punishable by beating. I just couldn't be bothered anymore.

'Are you protesting?' The guard said in an angry voice. 'Is this a hunger strike?'

I didn't say anything and this incident was again followed by a spate of beatings. I was thirsty again after the meal so I asked the officer to give me some water.

'I gave you some water this mornig and that was for the whole day.'

The answer was very clear so I stayed quiet for the rest of the day.

Sergeant Major Maung Thein returned in the evening to resume the questioning and I noticed a change in his tone. His voice took on a tone of pity.

'Phone Myint Tun, you're a stubborn man you know. You won't get hurt if you just answer my questions correctly. Look at you, you look like shit. All you have to do is tell us what you know and we'll let you go. Once you are out, you'll only be required to report to us regularly about the movement. Can you do that? It's a small matter. I am telling you this because it will do you some good. We'll release you immediately if you agree.'

I understood exactly what he was asking me to do. He wanted me to be an informer. I told him I couldn't do what he wanted and he slapped me in the face.

'If you can't do what we are asking you to do, you will have to spend a long time in prison. You know what a prison is? It's where people are slowly tortured to death.'

'I'm not afraid of prison,' I replied. 'I knew I'd get arrested some day and go through this because of what I've done. If I have to, I'll gladly go to prison.'

As I finished speaking he hit me across the head and said it was extremely rude of me to talk to him in such a way.

On the fifth day, the questioning and beatings continued as before, but this time they threatened to electrocute me. They told me not to be stubborn and promised that they would give me electric shocks if I was. In the course of the questioning, I heard a sound from one of the adjacent rooms. It was the sound of someone in acute pain, and it was continuous and frightening. I heard it clearer and louder when I was taken to the toilet for the second time. The guard who took me to the toilet told me that his colleagues were giving electric shocks to a stubborn man like me. I took it as a real threat. Out of curiosity, I listened closely to the screams of the man who was supposedly being electrocuted. However, the words heard were not Burmese. I was astonished to hear that the man was shouting in a foreign language that I couldn't recognise.

Near the toilet and still blindfolded, I tripped over someone who must have been sitting nearby. Much later in prison when political prisoners related to each other what they went through in the Interrogation Centres, I was surprised to learn that that someone I tripped over was Moe Aye. He was also blindfolded and placed in stocks. He said he got very angry every time someone bumped into him. He also told me that the one who was given electric shocks at the time was one of two Chinese student leaders. I knew about them from a press conference that General Khin Nyunt held before I was detained. The Chinese were arrested before they were able to enter the United State Embassy in Rangoon.

I was moved to another cell on the fifth day, and a soldier in uniform came to take my fingerprints. Soon after was moved into the new cell I heard lawyer U Saw Lwin, who was the general secretary of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, answering questions in another room. Later, U Saw Lwin and I would be taken to Insein Special Prison on the same day and placed in the same cell after both having gone through a hellish time at MI-7.

The questioning began again and continued into the evening. This time the questions were in more detail focusing on each answer I had given over the past four days. They covered a lot of areas including my role in various demonstrations, the meetings I had participated in, my connections with my colleagues who had been sentenced and all that I did for the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).

The next day, I was again transferred to another cell, but I think it was the previous room in which I had been repeatedly tortured. They said they would ask me more questions but instead they let me sleep that night. Only then did I realise that the room was full of mosquitoes and bugs.

In the mornign of my seventh day at the Interrogatio Centre, I heard someone telling Sergeant Major Maung Thein that the commander, a major, would visit the facility that day. At about one o'clock in the afternoon, I heard commands being shouted and guards saluting. I could also hear murmurs and muffled voices. Then I smelt strong perfume near my cell, and in no time the door opened and the smell of perfume was even stronger. Blindfolded, I heard Sergeant Major Maung Thein talking about me to his commander. When the major heard the brief report, he spoke to me.

'You are stiff-necked, aren't you?'

'I've told the MIS officials all I know,' I replied.

'Take the skin off this stubborn mother fucker Indian if he doesn't obey,' the major said.' He has done a lot of damage to us. Give the son of a bitch 15 years and let him take a rest in Insein.' The major then left with his entourage.

A few minutes later, the sergeant major gave me a cup of tea. Then he asked me what turned out to be the final questions. After that he hit me hard three times on my head with a stick and said, 'Sign here. These are your answers.'

I was not allowed to look at my supposed confession, but I quickly signed the paper anyway. I remember there was large space on the last page under which I was told to sign my name and write my home address along with the names of my parents. I had no idea what the space was going to be used for.

Around three o'clock that afternoon I heard my name being called out. An officer came over and told me that I would be released soon.

'You're going home,' he said.' But don't forget the Buddha and his teachings wherever you go.' Ironically, he then boxed my ears. I took it as a farewell punch.

Still blindfolded, I was told to jump over something, bend down as if avoiding something overhead and walk on all fours on my way out to the truck, the same as I was told to do on the way into the Centre. I was also ordered to lower my head the whole journey and not look out the vehicle. When I felt a hot wind blow across my face I realised I was out of the hands of the MIS. But I knew I would not be released. As I expected, my next home turned out to be the notorious Insein Prison.

When we arrived at the entrance to Insein Special Prison, I was again ordered to bend down to avoid something overhead. I decided to defy the order this time, but it was a mistake. My head hit the beam of the entrance door and the MIS officer also hit me for not obeying him.

My blindfold was taken off and a prison warden inspected me at the entrance. He found me to be a bruised and wounded prisoner. He then told the MIS officer that the prison could not accept me in such a condition. The officer was outraged and demanded that I be accepted. He insisted that the prison official sign a letter of refusal if the prison could not take me. It was a threat and it worked. I was eventually accepted as a new prisoner and so began another journey.

These were my expreisences at the MI-7 Interrogation Centre. I pay homage to those who have endured the horrors and tortures of the Interrogation Centres and prisons in Burma, and to those who have suffered more than me.

#### Endnotes

'alist kept of the people who live in a house, including the names of any guests who may be staying there. The authorities must be informed of anyguests before 9pm each night and random checks are carried out to ensure households comply.

A student from the All Burma Basic Educatio Students' Union (ABBESU).

See Moe Aye's personal account on page 68.

## **At The Mercy of the Beast**

By Ma Su Su Mon

### **About the Author**

Ma Su Su Mon was born in 1970 in Rangoon. During the 1988 pro-democracy uprising she was in her final year of high school and a member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).

Officers from Military Intelligence Service Unit 7(MI-7) arrested her in Rangoon in February 1991 and charged her under Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act. Three months later Ma Su Su Mon was sentenced to three years imprisonment and was released from Insein Prison in June 1993.

When I participated in the August 1988 popular uprising against the military government I was in my last year of High School. After the military coup in September 1988 I managed to escape twice from the Military Intelligence Service(MIS), but two-and-a-half years later I was not so lucky.

It was at midnight on February 14,1991 when the MIS, known as the 'notorious visitors', arrived at my home. They came along with an armed security force and officials from the then township Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC) claiming they wanted to check the guest list. After checking the names on the list with the people in the house, an MIS officer asked me whether I knew a girl by the name of Soe Soe. Soe Soe was my nickname, but I answered that I didn't know anyone by that name. The MIS officers then started searching my room and found my diary. After quickly reading through it they confiscated the book and said to my family that they would take me away for the moment for questioning and would send me home after that. However, I feared what might happen to me and was particularly concerned about the phrase 'for the moment'.

I was surprised that so many armed security personnel had come to arrest me. I felt so angry and wondered why they needed so many armed soldiers to catch a young female student. Then they ordered me to get into a small military truck. When I got into the truck I saw some male students with hoods over their heads. All were squatting and I was also ordered to squat and was then blindfolded. We were then driven to the headquarters of Military Intelligence Unit 7(MI-7).

When we arrived at MI-7 we were dragged to different cells. I could hear abusive language in the corridors and I began to tremble with fear. After taking my personal details, my fingerprints and my photo, they started interrogating me. I was still blindfolded.

At first they read out the letter I wrote to contact the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDf). Then they told me of the Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU). They asked me for the names of two girls from the ABFSU with whom I met. I knew that if I said I didn't know their names they would torture me. I also knew that if I were able to delay my answer, my friends would have time to escape. As soon as the MIS knew that I was hesitating they started threatening me.

'We have the right to do whatever we want to do,' an MIS officer told me. 'We are above the law, nobody has the right to accuse us of anything.'

Suddenly, someone flicked on a gas lighter next to my ear. I could hear the lighter burning and feel the heat of the flame. I then understood that I would have to face many different methods of torture.

After that I was pushed into a stinking cell. I was told to remove the hood myself and put it back over my head whenever they entered the room. When I took off

the hood I saw a table, two chairs and a very low, short bed in the cell. There was no window and I had some difficulty breathing because there was no fresh air.

During my interrogations I was forced to continuously squat and stand with my arms raised in the air. I had to do this even when I gave them information because they were never satisfied with my answers. The pain of squatting and standing was intense, and whenever I had to stop because of the pain someone would hit me with a cane stick across my hips and on my nipples. This torture went on for the whole night. Whenever I tried to re-fasten my sarong my interrogators would hit me across my arms.

'If you don't tell us the truth,' they mocked,' we will remove your sarong.'

I also heard screams and crying from the other cells. I felt as though I was in a World War II Japanese prisoner of war camp and thought that this is what it must have been like under the fascist occupation. Although I wanted to cry and get some kind of help, nobody could hear me. I was convinced that everyone who was brought here could die quite easily as a result of the MIS torture.

Because I was so tired as a result of the torture, I told my interrogators that I couldn't stand it any longer. I heard them laugh and I was severely beaten with a cane stick across my back.

'You're not human!' I shouted angrily.

Suddenly someone kicked me in the back with heavy military boots and I fell down on to the concrete floor. Although I was nearly unconscious, they ordered me to stand up. I tried to stand but I was very weak and someone kicked me again and I fell to the floor. After this happened three times I couldn't move anymore. I didn't even know if my sarong was still properly fastened.

I was in great pain and choking from the hood and the lack of fresh air. They then started beating me again with a rubber baton across my head. It was at that point that I thought I would never leave here alive.

When my physical situation deteriorated and I was unable to delay my interrogators any longer, I gave them some of the information they wanted. Only then did they offer me some water, but it was not as much as I wanted. I was still so very thirsty that I had to drink from the water pot in the toilet.

Although they tried to show that they were devout Buddhists, I knew that the MIS had severely beaten monks who were taken here for their involvement in the movement. While I was being questioned and tortured, I could smell alcohol on my interrogators, and as a Buddhist I was angry and also ashamed for my captors.

After they got the answers they wanted, they then tried to brainwash me.

'You should know that you are here because of your involvement in politics, which is none of your business,' one officer said gently.

'The government has built many parks and gardens for young people to enjoy. Prisons and Interrogation Centres are no place for young people.'

His words made me so angry, but I didn't reply. I was just worried for the future of our country.

I had been in the Interrogation Centre for three days and I hadn't been able to sleep very well. Whenever I tried to sleep on the so-called bed, the guards would slam the door loudly and shout abuse at me.

'Hey! The beautiful girl is sleeping alone,' they would shout.'If you want to show that the army is the strongest force in Burma, come on in here.'

One of the worst things was that I had to hold out from going to the toilet. Because I was blindfolded, I couldn't see anything on the way from my cell to the toilet. I didn't know who was near me and I didn't have the right to close the toilet door. I was sure that there were no female MIS personnel and for a Burmese virgin to

be seen by a man is the worst insult. The first time I went to the toilet I asked the guard to close the door, but he refused my request.

'You have to understand that my duty is to watch everything you do,' the guard said. 'If you attempt suicide in the toilet I will be punished. If you are shy, you should try not going to the toilet.'

The MIS later sent me to Insein Prison. As soon as I arrived there I felt both happy and sad. I was happy because of my release from the Interrogation Centre and sad because I had been sent to prison without committing a crime.

However, two weeks later I was sent back to MI-7 and interrogated again. The MIS accused me of plotting to blow up the Yeku communications tower in Rangoon which had just been attacked. They tried to get me to confess that I knew who was responsible for the attack and I realised that they had not yet caught the culprits. They urgently needed to conduct a press conference and have someone to blame for the attack. However, I didn't understand why they choose me. One officer threatened that if I couldn't eat or sleep. If I confessed to the crime, although I had nothing to do with it, I would be sentenced to death. I couldn't decide what to do; I was in an impossible situation and I nearly went mad. They repeatedly asked me where I had hidden the weapons and each time they asked me I felt suicidal. I eventually shouted at my interrogators to stop asking the same questions, and I broke down crying and pleaded with them not to continue the interrogation.

Three days later they sent me back to Insein Prison where I was detained for over two years.

#### Endnotes

'A list kept of the people who live in a house, including the names of any guests who may be staying there. The authorities must be informed of any guests before 9pm each night, and random checks are carried out to ensure households comply.'

### **In the Flames of Evil**

By Win Naing Oo

#### About the Author

During the political upheaval in 1988, Win Naing Oo was a final year student at Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT). He participated in the pro-democracy demonstrations and after the coup in September 1988 he fled to the Indian-Burma border.

He soon returned to Burma and worked with student organisations in the struggle for democracy. Win Naing Oo was then forced to flee to the Thai border after the military raided Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house in July 1989 and seized, among other things, his biography and a political analysis he had written.

On the Thai border, Win Naing Oo was instrumental in establishing the ABSDF's underground network and he secretly went back into Burma in Rangoon and was arrested and detained a week after he arrived in Rangoon and was sentenced to

three years jail. While being detained by Military Intelligence, he was interrogated and tortured by two MIS Units-6 and MI014.

After two years of abuse and torture in Insein Special Prison, Win Naing Oo was transferred to Thayet Prison North of Rangoon. While in detention he was placed in solitary confinement-once in detention he was placed in solitary confinement-once in Insein and twice in Thayet prison. He was released in 1992 and three years later fled to Thailand where he wrote a book entitled 'Cries From Insein', which details the conditions for political prisoners in Insein Prison.

*Win Naing Oo is currently working in Oslo, Norway, with the Democratic Voice of Burma(DVB).*

May 20, 1990

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when I returned to the house where I was hiding out in Rangoon. I had just had discussion with a monk from the All Burma Young Monks' Union, and some students from the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU). When I arrived at the house, my friend Aung Thu was there and said he'd arranged to meet Wai Lin, but our friend hadn't turned up. I asked him what he thought had happened and he said he didn't know. I suggested he go to Wai Lin's home to find out, so he left and returned a while later.

" Wai Lin wasn't home either," he said as he walked in.

"He has been arrested?" I asked.

" I don't know."

" I couldn't work out what had happened and I began to worry. Should I go into town?"

" No. don't go," said Aung Thu." " It's almost ten o'clock. There are no more cars or rickshaws, only military trucks doing the rounds, and no one will be on the streets."

He was right of course. The curfew started at 10pm and it was almost that time. There was an order that no one was allowed out between ten at night and four in the morning.

There was nothing I could do. I could only wait and face whatever was coming. In preparation I hid a few things and moved to a different house. I had about five places to stay in this quarter, but Wai Lin knew all of them. I prepared myself so that if I were arrested I wouldn't panic or show my fear. I wanted it to be four o'clock as soon as possible. My plan was to leave the house at three-thirty in the morning. I had decided that when it seemed certain that Wai Lin had been arrested I would escape to Mandalay. My thoughts were in turmoil and I grew paranoid and began to wonder if the house was surrounded. I tried to keep my spirits up by joking with my hosts.

At about midnight the military Intelligence Service (MIS) officers arrived. They were in plain clothes. Five came in and I caught a glimpse of some others in the street. They looked relaxed and as though they wanted to get out of the house as soon as possible. They made a cursory search but didn't find anything. Then they handcuffed me. A man of about 40 appeared to be the highest-ranking officer. I whispered to him not to handle me roughly in front of my hosts, as I was worried that they would be concerned for my safety. He agreed to my request and the officers stayed calm.

The MIS also arrested Aung Thu and brought him with them. They asked where our friend Zaw Htet was and when I replied that he had left yesterday and not returned, they asked where we thought he might be. It appeared that they wanted to arrest all of us that night. Although I knew where Zaw Htet was likely to be, I told them I had no idea where he was. That same night two other groups of MIS

surrounded the houses of two other students, but the students were away on a trip and escaped capture. The MIS also failed to get Zaw Htet.

They told Aung Thu and me to get into a mini-van and sit facing each other. They then stuck their guns in our backs. I winked at Aung Thi because he looked worried. The MIS officers weren't saying anything and it was tense in the van, so I felt as if I had to say something. I laughed and said, 'Brother, please don't point your guns may go off accidentally. Even though I am doing this sort of work, I am afraid of dying.'

They didn't laugh or say anything, nor did they put their guns down.

As there was no answer I continued. 'I want to explain something to you brothers. We don't believe in the use of violence. We are the kind of people who only use nonviolent methods of protest. The way in which you are arresting us now seems as if you are trying to drive us all into the jungle to take up arms.'

I was actually lying as I had in fact just come back from the jungle. It was at that point the officers responded.

'you shut your mouth!' shouted one of them. 'We didn't arrest you to listen to your speeches! We'll see what happens to your mouth when we get there, mother fucker!'

The guy beside me skashed his gun into my ribs. It was extremely painful.

'Down on the floor, both of you!'

They covered our heads with big black bags and everything went dark. I then began to get a little frightened.

I remember that the van turned many corners. I tried to keep track of where I was, but after a while I was lost. After what seemed like about three hours of driving around in circles, the car finally came to a stop. We heard what sounded like a guard shout a question, as if we had arrived at our destination. Then I felt as if we were driving onto a courtyard. We stopped again. 'Get up!' someone shouted at us. Because of our handcuffs and hoods, we grouped our way to the back of the van, trying not to fall over. At that moment I felt a boot in my back, and I fell out of the car. When I hit the ground people started shouting abuse at me and kicking me. I didn't know how many people there were. I was almost unconscious. It was at that time I realised that I was in for it. They then dragged me along the ground and threw me onto the floor of a cell.

'Sit up! Lean against the wall!' someone shouted.

I squatted and leaned against the wall. Whoever was in the room left and I heard the door bang shut. I felt tired and my whole body ached. Worry and fear crept over me. I was wondering what was going to happen to me now, and not knowing made the nightmare even worse.

Being totally blind gives one an intense feeling of vulnerability. I lay in the darkness, feeling completely alone, forsaken and uncertain of everything around me. It became clear to me that they blindfolded suspects, not only to prevent us from seeing who they were but also to intensify our feeling of fear and isolation.

Upon arrival at the MIS Interrogation Centre, they treated us as if we were animals rather than human beings. It was yet another of the many tactics they used to break our morale and confidence.

It was quiet in the cell, and it was also hot and stuffy. After an hour or two the door banged open and the noise started me. I guessed that four or five people had come into the room. One of them shouted a series of four letter words at me and hit me across my face. I felt a sharp burning pain. I couldn't even defend myself with my hands handcuffed as they were behind my back. Another beating. Another sharp pain. I was seeing stars and felt as if my eyeballs were going to pop out of my head.

'You think that you are so clever, don't you?' one of them was saying. 'You don't even realise that we have known what you've been doing and have allowed you to do it all along. You mother fuckers! But now you've taken it too far.'

I tried to stay calm and not cry out in pain.

'Speak up now. Give us some more of your speeches. Fuck your nonviolence!'

I was panting. I tried to say something, but nothing came out. They stood around me and kicked me from every side, like a lynch mob attacking a common criminal. My life seemed so hopeless at that moment. I don't remember if I cried out or not, but I do recall rolling about on the cement floor. The beating and kicking continued. They pulled me up and made me sit against the wall, but I was so dizzy I couldn't even balance with the wall as a support and I fell back on the floor. One of them pulled me up again. Another steadied me. Another hit me in the face but he missed and hit my throat instead. For a few moments I was unable to get any air into my lungs and almost blacked out. Later on I would have great difficulty drinking, as it was extremely painful to swallow.

After the beating they left the room and I was left lying on the floor. I wondered whether my ribs were broken. I could hardly breathe and actually wished I could pass out, but I didn't.

A month after this beating in Insein Special Prison, I could still feel the pain in my right ribs. I still couldn't breathe properly and had to take short gasps of air, and rest in between. It was also extremely painful to turn my head and every time I did so I would cry out in pain. While in prison, I wasn't given any medical treatment for my injuries and I had to ask my family to bring me some medicine.

A long while after the beating, I heard footsteps and the door was kicked open again.

'They are going to torture me again,' I thought. 'This time I'll lose consciousness.'

I was frightened, but I tried in vain not to show my fear. I still couldn't see anything, I could only hear. But they forced me to sit on a chair which I slumped into and they started asking about my personal details. The way they asked their questions was almost as bad as the beatings. The questions were spat out in a rapid, staccato manner. When they started I had trouble replying immediately. If I faltered or could not answer a question immediately, they would hit me across my face. I figured they believed that any hesitation in my answers meant I was trying to lie to them. Looking back on it, trying to anticipate which questions they would beat me was actually more traumatizing than when they were just plain beating me up. Some of their questions I was able to answer, some I couldn't either because I didn't know the answer or because I couldn't give them the information without putting friends or our work in danger. I tried to convince them that I didn't play a big role in the movement, so I had to lie to them.

Eventually I learned that I could minimise the beatings if I answered the questions as quickly as possible. For those questions that I couldn't answer or didn't want to answer, it was better to reply 'I don't know' as quickly as possible, rather than to lie. Although they still hit me every time I said that I didn't know, the beating was not as brutal as when they caught me lying. The longer the interrogation lasted, the harder it became to remember what I had lied about and the greater the chance of being caught out.

When they arrest two or more people together, it is more difficult to lie because those arrested are interrogated separately and their answers are compared. Because we had to answer so quickly, we were at risk of giving them clues that could direct their questions towards the information that we most wanted to keep from them. Any such clues that they would pick up from interrogating one prisoner would then be used in the interrogation of the others. For these reasons it was almost impossible to lie. I was, however, able to get away with a few lies about details that only I knew, or details that the other people arrested with me only knew.

My interrogations continually repeated questions and even used clues from other people who had been arrested before me. It took me some time before I realised that this was what they were doing.

The continuous questioning was made even harder by the fact that they hadn't offered me any water since my arrest. My lips were cracking and splitting. I had repeatedly asked for some water, but each time I did so they beat me for merely asking. However, after about two days when I asked again, I wasn't beaten.

'Okay, we'll give you some water, but you'll have to write something first,' my interrogator began. 'The report you submitted to the All Burma Students' Democratic Front had more than sixty pages. If you write that down for us we will give you some water.'

'How could I possibly remember that much? It wasn't even as long as sixty pages.'

'Don't lie! Write down as much as you can remember. We know that it was longer than sixty pages. If you want some water you had better get started.'

They removed my handcuffs and as they left one of them shouted, 'You can take off your hood now, but if you hear the door open put it on again immediately.'

I removed my hood and my eyes were stabbed by the brightness. I noticed they had left me a pen and some paper. I was so thirsty.

'Is it really possible to live as long as this without water?' I wondered to myself. 'Surely not.' I picked up the pen and paper and started to think. 'What should I write?' I couldn't recall one thing that I had written in the report. I wondered who had told them that it was over sixty pages long and whether or not they had a copy of the report. I couldn't work out what had happened, but I was so thirsty that I started writing anyway.

After about an hour I heard the door open and I quickly put on the hood. A man came in. He sat in front of me and snatched the papers. He then slapped me hard across my face. I saw stars and almost fell onto the floor. Then he started swearing at me. 'You wrote only two pages in one hour?'

'I can only remember that much,' I replied.

'Look up, you idiot! You are all smashed up but you don't feel sorry for yourself yet, is that right?'

'I do feel so sorry for myself.'

'I'll go out now, and I want you to write some more. You are going to die, you idiot! Look, I want you to know that we'll continue to beat you even after you're dead.' He smashed his fist into the table and left.

What was I to do? I tried to think but nothing came out. I could only envisage water. Water. Water. I picked up the pen and began to write again. I wrote everything that came into my head.

*'Without a revolutionary spirit there can be no revolutionary thinking, and without revolutionary thinking there can be no revolution. So we have to build up the revolutionary spirit. Freedom, democracy, peace, human dignity, humanity, patriotism, a new country free from hatred.'*

I didn't know what I was writing. It was not in order. One thing I was sure about was that the content was not the same as the report. But I continued to write. Water. Water. All for some water.

I didn't know how long I had been writing when the man came back in. I put down the pen and pulled the hood over my head again. I assumed that he was reading what I had written, probably with great interest. I had written about ten pages. Frightened, I tried to anticipate when he was going to hit me. I waited for the blows. After a while he said, 'You ought to have done this from the start. I'll give you some water now,' and he left.

I breathed a sigh of relief. But I didn't know what he was so pleased about. I felt uneasy. He came back in, handcuffed me again, and put a cup of water down in front of me.

'When I lift your hood above your mouth, don't look at me. Just drink.'

But he hadn't freed my hands, they were still handcuffed behind my back. He lifted the hood and I could see a small teacup of water in front of me. I bent over, put

my lips of the mouth of the cup and tried to slurp it up as a dog or pig would do. When I had drunk about half of it he said 'enough!' and took the cup away.

'Let me finish it!' I pleaded.

'Shut up!' He yelled.

I was totally devastated. Then they started to interrogate me again.

After a while, I had an idea. I said to my interrogator that I wanted to go to the toilet. 'Not now,' he said. But then he released my hands and helped me stagger to the toilet. Inside the toilet he removed my hood. I saw a small pot of water for washing and flushing and I was immediately overjoyed. Then I looked more closely and realised my misfortune. There was almost no water left in the pot. The coconut shell scraped the bottom of the pot as I tried to scoop up some water. A second later, the man waiting outside threw a brick into the toilet and it smashed against the wall.

'Come out of there you mother fucker! You're trying to drink the toilet water, aren't you!'

The coconut shell dropped from my hands, and I hurriedly left the toilet. Thank God he didn't hit me. Then I realised that they wouldn't even let me drink the toilet water.

I later learnt that I was interrogated at Military Intelligence Unit 14 (MI-14) for four days. For the first two days they gave me no water, for three days no food and for the whole four days I wasn't allowed to sleep. The days and nights were crammed together indistinguishably, and filled only with the sound of beatings, questions and abuse. It was difficult to tell for I couldn't see, but I think two groups conducted the interrogation. Sometimes the interrogators were less brutal and a bit more polite and persuasive. They said that I should think of my family. Their threats were not strong and they listened patiently to my answers. They even remained calm when they knew that I was lying.

But when this group left another group would come in and they were brutal beyond belief. The moment they came in they would beat me without saying anything. They would kick me from behind, slap my face and shout at me. I was a sandbag. I would fall off the chair, or become jammed between the table and chair as a result of the torture. The shouting, abuse and beatings would come from all directions. Then they would start to ask questions but the torture would continue. My head felt as if it would explode because of the rapidity at which emotions and sensations flowed through my body - acute pain, shock, anger, frustration and loneliness. Then more beatings would follow, as would more questions.

The times they left me alone in the room, I was frightened by the beatings, shouts, moans and agonising screams coming from the next room. Listening to these harrowing sounds and being powerless to help was almost as bad as being beaten myself. It broke my morale and confidence. It was all there in my mind. I was confused and couldn't concentrate because of the lack of sleep, food and water. I became unsure of reality and my answers became inconsistent. Was I dreaming, or was all this really happening?

My ability to focus only came back to me when the beatings became less frequent a few days later. That was when they began the psychological torture. I think they changed their tactics because they didn't want me to lose. I certainly had passed out, which was what I longed for. Only then would I be free from the beatings, and the incessant questions. If I was unconscious I might have been able to regain a little of my strength and stamina. I might have been better able to withstand the cruel treatment that was to come. This was apparently what they didn't want. If I passed out, they wouldn't be able to continue questioning me.

I was transferred from MI-14 to another place which I later learnt was MI-6. Before they sent me to MI-6 they told me that it was the biggest military intelligence

department, that it had all the facts about us, and that the people there knew everything.

They are rougher and tougher than us, they added, 'however we won't send you there if you tell us all the details you haven't yet told us.'

I didn't say anything, but their warnings worried me. Later, when I was trying to recall all that had happened to me, I remembered that it was May 23 when I was transferred to MI-6.

When I arrived I was taken to room, ordered to sit in a chair and was then left alone. Neither the hood nor the handcuffs had been about three hours I began to have difficulty breathing. I was later told by people who had gone through the same experience that this room was completely sealed and same experience that this room it difficult to breathe. The hood was smelly now and I thought of someone watching me from across the room. Because of the warnings from the people at MI-14, I was even more worried than usual. I was dripping with sweat and my thoughts were so confused that I became dizzy and I almost fell off the chair a few times. I couldn't stand it any longer, I had to do something.

At last I heard the door open. Someone led me out of the room and into another. It was easier to breathe in this room and cooler as well. I didn't know whether it was day or night but the room was dazzlingly bright. A moment later I heard people come in. From their footsteps I reckoned there were quite a few of them. They sat facing me, but his voice was sharp and penetrating and felt as though it was piercing my eardrums.

"The place that you just left, was it very bad?" the officer asked.

"Yes, it was."

"You have not been allowed to sleep for a long time, have you?"

"I haven't been allowed to sleep since I was detained."

"Do you know what this place it?"

"No. I have no idea", I replied.

"What did they tell you about this place before you left?"

"They said this is the biggest department."

"The place that you just left, was it very bad?" the officer repeated.

"It was very bad."

"How bad is that?"

"I wasn't allowed to sleep," I began. "They gave me food just once before I was sent here. They didn't give me any water for two days. They beat me and abused me all the time."

They stopped asking questions and I heard them whispering among themselves. I didn't know what they were talking about. My ears were buzzing. I could hardly steady myself, and I became dizzy whenever I tried to catch what they were saying. After a while I heard one of them speak.

'I have told them over and over again not to treat you guy this badly. They don't listen to me. Idiots! I'll punish them.'

He called them names and I felt greatly relieved. But then I began to suspect that their friendliness was just a ploy, and that they were just as brutal as the other people. They asked a few questions about my personal details, questions which I had already answered a million times.

'By the way, you have two sisters-in-law, right?'

I assumed that they had studied my answers from MI-14. 'Yes,' I replied.

'I don't see one of their names.'

'I heard them laugh. One of them quipped, 'It's a pity that you don't recall the names of your own sisters-in-law.' The interrogator continued, 'Okay. We'll take off the hood and give you some rice. But I can't guarantee whether you'll be allowed to sleep or not because it all depends on you. And I doubt that you'll be allowed to sleep tonight as we are running out of time. At night we interrogate in shifts, so you won't be allowed to sleep, but we will. Now I'll tell you a little bit about our department. No

one has left this room without telling us what he knows. Have you seen sugar cane being squeezed between two rollers?'

'Yes, I have.'

'You'll be squeezed like sugar cane if you don't answer the questions correctly. You understand?'

'Yes,' I said, but I thought to myself they'll never know whether or not I'm answering the questions correctly.

'We have collected a lot of facts about you. They are almost complete. Now take pity on yourself. You look like shit. You know that, don't you? So you have to take pity on yourself. Nobody else will, will they?'

'No.'

'What the people said at the place you just left is true. We are the biggest department. Aung Gyi has sat where you are sitting now. Tin Oo and Thakin Tin Mya have also sat here. They had to confess all they knew. It is no use trying to hide anything from us in this kind of situation. You best remember that.'

I heard them stand up and walk out. Then I heard one of them shout back to someone who was still in the room, 'Close the door and take off the hood.'

The hood was removed and a bright light blinded me. I closed my eyes and tried to open them again and it took me a while before I could see. But then I felt greatly relieved, and I was able to breathe more easily. I saw a man about 40 years old standing in front of me. He was tracing his eyes on me. He had a plain but hard-looking face. He was wearing a big gold chain around his neck, and a gold watch stood out on his wrist against his brown skin. He was stout and had a few pockmarks on his face.

'You're a final year student from the Rangoon Institute of Technology, aren't you?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'You're an educated person. We'll treat you politely since you were treated badly at the previous place.'

I remained silent.

'My first question is....Does Max work for the CIA?'

'I don't know,' I said. Max worked for a religious organisation based in Bangkok and I had met him earlier that year.

'Don't pretend. I'm treating you as politely as I can. I'll ask you the same questions again. Does Max work for the CIA?'

'I have no idea. He may be from the CIA, or he may work for a Christian organisation.'

'He works for the CIA, and you know it.'

'If he's CIA, there's no way I could know. They're well trained,' I replied.

'Admit that he's CIA.'

'I really don't know. But there's only one way to determine if he is.'

'That's a good boy. Now tell me what it is.'

'You must catch Max and interrogate him,' I said.

With that the man suddenly stood up and started beating me and shouting abuse at me. To this day I don't know why I answered as I did. I fell off the chair and couldn't get up from the floor.

'You're good for nothing!' he was shouting. 'You're not educated, you're a fucking stupid liar! You're inferior! You're nothing but a dirty beggar!'

He started kicking me. I couldn't say anything, I just grunted and groaned every time he hit and kicked me. I couldn't even cry out in pain. He then helped me back on to the chair. However I couldn't steady myself, so he went out and came back with a rope and tied me to the chair. I began to groan and then he suddenly quietened down. Could it be that he was starting to feel sorry for me, or was it just that he felt content after having beaten me?

'Okay, now, write down the Four Phases plan for me. I'll go out for a while,' he said.

He took off the handcuffs and when he left I started to write. I think I wrote a lot. The Four Phases Plan was to have been carried out three months before the 1990 elections, but in fact we weren't able to carry it out. I was wondering how they knew about the plan. Who had told them? Had they obtained a copy of it somehow? My morale was very low. I began to wonder how this information was leaked from the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) headquarters and to doubt the standard of security there.

He came back in after a while and read what I had written but out Special Tasks?'

I was horrified. They must have obtained a copy of everything from the headquarters. I felt like crying. I felt rejected. I felt as if my parents had disowned me. I later found out that they got all this information from Aung Hein, who treacherously ran away with three months of the ABSDF's supply money and who was arrested on his way back into Burma.

'I have nothing to do with that committee,' I said, 'and I don't know anything about it. Only the people at the headquarters know about it.'

## Two Times Too Many

By Cho Cho Htun Nyein

### About the Author

Cho Htun Nyein was born in November 1961 in Rangoon. In 1981, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Botany from Rangoon University and he became a Cho registered lawyer the following year.

During the 1988 uprising he joined the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), and after the September 1988 military coup he joined the National Political front (NPF) and was a member of party's Central Executive Committee.

The SLORC banned the NPF in August 1989, and Cho Cho Htun Nyein was immediately arrested and charged under Section 5(j) of the Emergency Provision Act and 10(a) of the State Protection Act. He was detained in Insein Prison for two-and-a-half years before being sentenced in January 1992 to three years imprisonment. Four months later on May 1, he was released from Insein Prison under a conditional amnesty in which he had to guarantee that he would not become involved in politics.

In March 1995, Cho Cho Htun Nyein was detained for two weeks after attending the funeral of former Prime Minister U Nu. After the December 1996 student demonstrations in Rangoon, he left for Thailand and is now working with the Burma Lawyers' Council in Bangkok.

### The First Arrest

On August 10, 1989, at around ten o'clock in the morning, I received a letter from the district Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC) in Tarmweh, Rangoon, requesting my presence in their office for questioning. At the time I was working as a District Youth Secretary for the National Political Front (NPF). The next day I arrived at the office at around 9.30 am and presented the letter to the LORC officials. They introduced me to a plain-clothed officer and told me to wait.

About an hour later I asked the officials if I would be questioned at the district office. They told me they wouldn't question me at the office, but that I would have to wait some time as the person who wished to question me had not yet arrive. While I was waiting I asked to go outside to get something to eat and they allowed me to leave. However, instead of getting some food, I returned to my office and left a message for my colleagues telling them what was going on.

When I returned to the LORC office I noticed a large Mazda T2000 pick-up truck parked out the front. I was told that the people who wanted to speak with me had arrived, and I was instructed to get into the back of the truck. I sat with two plain-clothed officers in the back of the pick-up, while another officer sat in the front. The vehicle was driven to the intersection near Kyau Myaun marked, then to the Karaweik Hotel past Kandawgyi and on toward the zoo.

When we arrived in the vicinity of the Rangoon Yacht Association building, one plain-clothed officer placed a black hood over my head. There was, however, a small hole in the hood which I could just see through. Shortly afterwards I was ordered to lie down on the floor of the pick-up. I asked them why they were doing this and they replied that it was for security reason. Through the small hole I could see an officer opening a black umbrella and positioning it over me to make sure I couldn't be seen from outside the vehicle. No one spoke as we headed to what I thought were the outskirts of Rangoon.

About 30 minutes later I was hand cuffed and I asked if I had been arrested. The officers told me that hadn't been arrested but that I was being restrained for security reasons. Ten minutes later the truck stopped and I heard the sounds of people moving about. I thought that the officers were possibly changing guard. I could also hear the sounds of buses and cars passing by and thought that I might be near a bus station. I also heard the sound of aeroplanes and a loud speaker and guessed that we were probably on the outskirts of town.

About 15 minutes later the pick-up turned off the main road into a small lane. It stopped shortly afterwards and the officers ordered me to get out. I noticed a significant change in their treatment of me. They were no longer polite but became arrogant and refused to answer any of my questions. My handcuffs were removed and I was told to walk through an iron gate. They removed the black hood from my head and placed another hood over me which I couldn't see out of. I was then ordered to walk again, and told to take a large stride across a small drain and to lower my head at intervals. We then arrived in a room that felt like a large ward.

In the room I was told to walk while squatting on my haunches. I then heard the sound of a door opening and someone told me to go through the door. When I entered the room I asked the officers for a drink of water, and I was told to reach out for a pot of water that was supposedly in front of me, but nothing was there. I then heard the door closing. I was instructed to stand with my back to the door so I couldn't see who was behind me, and was told to remove the hood. I was ordered to turn around and hand the hood to someone who was standing behind a small hole in the wall. With the hood removed, I could see a bright light on the ceiling as well as a table and chair, a bed, a mat and one military-issue blanket. There was one closed window with wire netting over it and a small ventilation grate above the window with similar wire netting.

After an hour or so, they returned the hood to me through the small hole in the wall and told me to put it over my head again. They then took me to a different room in the same building. When I arrived I sensed there were other people in the room. I heard a typewriter coming from upstairs and I presumed that I was somewhere in an office building.

The officers then commenced their interrogation asking me various questions about my connections with people in the underground student movement. The whole time my head was covered with the hood. They were again very arrogant when they questioned me. The questioning went on for what seemed to be almost two hours.

After the interrogation they took me to another room where I was again permitted to remove the hood. An hour later they returned and took me to another room for further questioning. This time their manner was even more arrogant and aggressive. When they were dissatisfied with my hands behind my head for a period of 15 minutes. I was told to sit in this position twice. The second time I was struck across the side of my face, just below my ear. The questions that I was asked were exactly the same as before, and this session also lasted for about two hours. I resumed that the interrogations were carefully planned and that they wanted to get certain kinds of answers from me.

After the second interrogation session they didn't ask me any further questions, although I was confined in the cell for five days. I was given rice with vegetables or peas in the morning, and in the evening I was given a small amount of meat with rice. The rice was never cooked very well.

On the night of the fourth day I was moved to another room. Another student leader, who I knew, was brought into the room. He thought that we would soon be transferred to prison. That afternoon we were not allowed to read. I was photographed from the front and on both sides with an identification board.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, I was instructed to cover my head and was taken to a small van with about 20 other people in it. After driving for 45 minutes, I heard a crowd of people and was instructed to get out of the van. We were led through a large gate into a big compound and told to remove our hoods. I then realised that I was in the compound of Insein Prison. I was registered and taken to a small isolation cell, Room 22 in Ward 4. Although I wasn't told what I had been charged with, or what my sentence was, I saw that I was registered as a '5(j)' prisoner. I then knew that I had been charged under Section 5(j) of the Emergency Provision Act. I was taken to the Insein Prison military court and was not allowed to say anything in front of the judge.

Inside Insein Prison I was often moved from one room to another. Some months later I was moved to Cell Block 1 because the authorities changed my charge. I was imprisoned in Insein for two and a half years and during this time we were not allowed visits from friends or family. I did, however, receive one parcel from my family containing food. We were fed rice and vegetables or peas with rice every morning, and in the evening again fed rice with boiled pork or some other meat. We were not given any medical treatment aside from some pills. A medical officer checked people on a weekly basis but no care was given. We had to rely on medicines that were sent to us from outside. I was not interrogated further during my period of imprisonment.

On January 29, 1992, a military court inside Insein Prison found me guilty of committing two crimes-breaching Section 5(j) of the Emergency Provisions act and breaching Section 22 of the Publishing Act. I was sentenced to three years imprisonment. A few months later I was given a sheet of paper on which there were ten questions and a prison official said I was required to answer all of them. I can recall only eight questions.

Q: Which political organisations are you involved in?

A: The National Political Front (NPF)

Q: What Positions did you have with these organisations?

A: A member of the Central Executive Committee and a District Youth Secretary.

Q: What do you think of the NLD?

A: The NLD won the election.

Q: What do you think of Suu Kyi winning the Nobel Peace Prize?

A: I am very proud of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi because she is the first Burmese woman to win such an award and she is the daughter of General Aung San.

Q: What do you think of the SLORC?

A: As you have taken charge of the country's affairs, we have military rule.

Q: Will you continue your involvement in politics after your release?

A: I will continue until Burma achieves democracy.

Q: What kind of life do you want after your release?

A: I want to live together with my family and I want to continue to be involved in politics.

Q: What do you want to do in the future?

A: Under a democratic government, I want to live a peaceful and prosperous life. I also want to work for the good of my people.

Around ten days later, on May 1, 1992, order 11/92 was issued for release. I was in the fifth group of prisoners to be released at that time. At around 2pm on the same day I was informed that my mother had died.

### The Second arrest

On March 12, 1995, the funeral ceremony of former Prime Minister, U Nu, was held in Rangoon during which a number of students staged a demonstration. The same evening at around 1:30 am, I was driving home with a friend after doing a shift driving my taxi when I was stopped by a man near my home. He asked if I had a driver's license and I replied that I did. He then asked for my name and where I lived. I pointed out my home which wasn't far, and asked what was going on. The man replied that he worked for Special Branch and that he had some questions to ask me. I told him that I wanted to ask my car home before going with them. My home was about 150 yards from the road, and nobody could see what was going on.

I got out of the car and there were five plain-clothed officers, including a district Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC) official. They told me that my car would be returned to my home and that I was to follow them immediately. I argued briefly with them, but in the end I was forced to give my car keys to the LORC officers. My friend and I were handcuffed together in the back of the pick-up. I asked if I was being arrested but they just told me to shut up. They refused to answer any of my questions. When the car started to leave, my brother came out of our house to see what was happening and I told him not to worry, but to take care of the house while I was gone. We were ordered to lie down in the back of the truck and to keep silent. At times I looked out of the car and realised that we were heading in the direction of Kaba Aye Pagoda. The pick-up then turned in the direction of Kyay Wai Pagoda and we were taken to Aung Thapyei Police Station, the headquarters of Special Branch. We were led into a large office in which there were two or three tables and six chairs. I was separated from my friend and ordered to sit in front of one of the tables and was handcuffed to a chair.

They started the interrogation by handing me a form to fill out regarding my personal details. They then asked various questions pertaining to U Nu's funeral. I replied that my friend was not involved in the ceremony or the demonstration and requested that they release him. They didn't reply, but instead asked further questions. It became clear that they suspected me of organising people to demonstrate at the funeral. I replied that my friend was not involved in the ceremony or the demonstration and requested that they release him. They didn't reply, but instead asked further questions. It became clear that they suspected me of organising people to demonstrate at the funeral. They said that even if I didn't organise the protest, I must know the leaders of the demonstration and which organisations were involved. I replied that I didn't know who was involved in organising the demonstration and that I attended the ceremony because U Nu had been a prominent figure in Burmese politics for a long time, even up until his death, and that he had been a good man.

They interrogated me for about an hour. Later, they gave me another chair and I was told to soleep on the two chairs while I was still handcuffed. I even had to wear the handcuffs when I went to the toilet. In the morning I was given mohingha noodles ofr breakfast, and fried rice for lunch which I ate while handcuffed.

At around 5pm in the afternoon I was put in a car with another young man and a young woman and we were taken to the jail at Mayangone Police Station where we slept the night. Later, I found out that the young man was Htun Myint Aung from the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU), and the woman was Kyi Myint Tai from the Insein District undreground movement. The next morntng saw Lwin Oo from the Rangoon Institute of Technology Students' Union was also p8ut in our cell and that afternoon we were transferred to the jail at Hlaing Police Station.

Later, myself along with Maung Maung Kyaw, Ko Hla Htay (a.k.a.Kya Gyi), from Kandaw Lay, Ko Thar Gyi (a.k.a. Thaw Htun Oo)from Kamaryut and the woman from Insein, were all transferred to Insein Prison where we were placed in Room 22, Ward 5. Thefollowing morning we were transferred to Ward 2 and we slept the night there. We were treated as though we were criminals.

The following we were again transferred, this time to an isolated group of cells and all our privileges were suspended.Every two days we were given a full body search to find out if we had any connection with the outside movement. We were only allowed to bathe and use the toilet for 15 minutes each day,, during which time the lightswere turned off and the doors were closed so nobody could see us from the outside. During my period of incarceration we were fed peas with rice in the morning, and in the evening we got vegetables and rice mixed together with leftovers from other meals.

After eight days we were interrogated again. We were questioned one at a time by the same people and at no time were we asked about our well being. When we complained about our treatment we were simply ignored. They contnued to ask questions about who organised the U Nu funeral demonstration. I told them that perhaps there was no one person or organisation responsible for organising the demonstration, and that may be the protest occurred because people felt strongly at the time.

They asked me if I would continue to involve myself in politics. I answered that as sure as they were sitting at the table and I was sitting in the chair in the middle of the prison, I would continue to concern myself with political issues. I further stated that if they released us we wold continue to involve ourselves in political affairs, even though it is difficult for us to organise ourselves outside. We were each interrogated for about 45 minutes and then sent back to our cells.

Forty days later I was released from Insein, and I returned home. During my detension I was never brought before a court or a jury, handed an official sentence, or allowed to speak on my own behalf. Following my release, I was watched closely for a long time.

#### Endnotes

This order was a selected amnesty in 1992 in which a number of political prisoners were released under the condition that they no longer involve themselves in politics.

## Into The Darkness

By Tin Win Aung

About the Author

Tin Win Aung currently lives in exile in Thailand and was an under ground organiser for the All Burma Federation of Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF).

Military Intelligence Service (MIS) officers arrested him on his second trip into Burma from the Thai-Burma border. He was arrested in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State in eastern Burma on February 22, 1993 while he was making his way back to the border.

When he was arrested, Tin Win Aung he had successfully completed his mission in Burma which was to meet with elected Members of Parliament and representatives of various pro-democracy organizations and discuss a campaign of non-cooperation. His visit followed the military's announcement that it would hold a National Convention to draft a new Constitution.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon on February 22,, 1993, and I was having a cup of tea at a shop in Hlaing Bwe, Karen State. A military jeep pulled up in front of the shop and I saw three passengers and the driver get out. I noticed that despite the jeep being a military vehicle, all its occupants were dressed in civilian clothes.

They appear to be in a hurry and all of a sudden I sensed danger. My fears were realised when they all headed straight for my table and surrounded me. One of the faces of the officers looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. He seemed to be the leader of the group and he looked straight at me and said in a hushed voice, 'Could you come with us for a quick chat?'

'What for?' I replied.

'Shut up, you son of a bitch!' the leader abruptly shouted.

Before I could say anything further they grabbed my hands and handcuffed me behind my back. After they bundled me in to the jeep, the group leader took out a pistol and cocked it. He then placed the pistol up against my temple.

'See what this is? Don't even think about causing trouble,' he threatened.

By this time I wasn't worried any longer. I had considered myself to be at great risk returning to Burma and I was prepared for what would now happen. I didn't show them any fear and the officer with the pistol sensed my resolve.

'Consider yourself a dead man if I'm included in the interrogation team,' he said as soon as the car sped off.

I later learned that he was the Commander of Military Intelligence Service Unit 25 (MI-25). He looked familiar because I had helped chase him away during a demonstration in Mudon in 1988 while he was gathering information about us. That day he lost his pistol, his bag and his motorbike.

At the Hlaing Bwe Police Station, the MIS officers moved all the prisoners into one of the two cells and placed me in the other cell on my own. This elevated my status to a special prisoner and I immediately thought that what was in store for me would be very unpleasant. With this realisation, my previous coolness began to disappear.

The following day I was driven southwest to Pa-an, the capital of Karen State and a car with security personnel drove in front of us. As soon as we passed the Hlaing Bwe Township limits, the MIS officers pulled a hood over my head. There was complete darkness; I couldn't see a thing. For the first time in my life I began to appreciate the importance of sight. I also began to feel lonely and abandoned.

An hour passed, the car stopped and I was forced to get out. I walked about four steps before the MIS stopped me and told me to bend down to avoid something. With the

hood still over my head, I couldn't see what was in the way. I obeyed, but one of them said that it wasn't far enough so I bent down further and walked forward.

'Jump over it! Jump over it!' an officer suddenly shouted.

I then jumped over something, but I didn't know what it was. I was then repeatedly told to either bend down or to jump to avoid things, and I was periodically allowed to rest. After doing this about 20 times I started feeling tired and humiliated, and I soon couldn't stand hearing the orders and shouts any longer. I also grew suspicious at what they were doing. As a result, I decided that the next time I was ordered to bend down or jump over something I would instead walk straight ahead. The order to bend down was given but I disobeyed and walked upright. My heart missed a beat and I didn't bump into anything. I then realised that I had been walking, bending over and jumping in the middle of an open space. I later learned from experienced prisoners that Military Intelligence often ordered political suspects to act in this way. This treatment is usually given to those the MIS don't particularly like or to someone whose morale needs to be broken. I suddenly grew angry and felt further humiliated knowing that all along I had been standing in the middle of an open space.

'Not bad,' exclaimed another.

'What an actor!' exclaimed another.

'He can pass for a real actor!'

I shouted back at them, 'You've gone too far.'

The MIS officers burst out laughing. Degraded and humiliated, I slumped to the ground unable to take it any longer. They then dragged me to a room and threw me in. A few minutes later I heard an MIS officer make a phone call and I heard my name being mentioned. Then suddenly an officer banged open the door to my room. I was startled and also terrified for I didn't know what they were going to do to me.

The MIS officers began to question me. I thought they'd ask me questions about the government literary club incident, and that they'd tell me of the arrests of three of my colleagues and that they knew everything about me and my operations. However, I was dead wrong. They began by asking me questions about which I knew nothing. It was totally unexpected and for a moment I didn't know what to say. They thought I was hesitating in order to think up some lie, and one of the officers kicked me across my chest and I fell over backwards from the chair I was sitting on. My head hit the cement floor and I blacked out for a moment. When I came round I found that they had handcuffed me behind my back.

'Bring the machine,' an officer ordered.

In no time, I heard the buzzing of a motor and I began to feel a little nervous. I thought they were probably going to give me electric shocks. I had heard of this torture before and the realisation of what was coming was terrifying. The sound of the buzzing was even more frightening. Then, at the last minute, someone intervened.

'Stop what you are doing. Write down whatever he says. We'll have to send him somewhere else.'

I sighed with enormous relief and thought myself extremely lucky. They then asked me a lot of questions and I gave them some answers. I knew they had to let me go. When the interrogation session was over, they took off the hood and gave me some food. I could see the dissatisfaction on the face of the commander. I assumed he must have remembered me from the Mudon incident and he seemed annoyed at not being able to torture me to his heart's content.

Although the food tasted disgusting, I ate it all as I was hungry and needed sustenance. After I finished eating, an officer handcuffed me and told me to sleep. I was overjoyed at the opportunity to have time to rest. However, the thought of what might happen tomorrow occupied my mind and I began to worry. 'Where are they going to send me?' I thought to myself, 'What will they ask?' 'How will they torture me?'

I lay down on the cement floor but it was cold, so I got up and walked up and down the small cell contemplating what lay ahead of me. I thought about freedom, and that

freedom was what mattered most. When you lose your freedom, you lose everything. I couldn't sleep that night. My loneliness, helplessness and worries about what sleep that night. My loneliness, helplessness and worries about what lay ahead kept me awake all night. However, it was the only time throughout my period of interrogation that I was allowed to sleep.

The following mornig two men in military jackets woke me up. One of them was holding a hood in his hand and as expected they covered my head with the hood and handcuffed me behind my back. They then pushed me into a car and drove off. I sensed it was still dark outside.

I soon realised the car had no roof and that it was going very fast. Although winter was about to end, I was shivering in the morning cold.

'Could I go to the toilet and get my jumper from my bag?' I asked the MIS officers.

'Shut your foul mouth! We're not going on a picnic!' one of them replied.

I fell silent until we reached Myaing Gale, a small town on the banks of the Salween River. Across the river was Pa-an, the capital of Karen State. The MIS officers took the hood offmy head and a bright morning sun greeted me. I understood that they couldn't take me across the river on the public ferry with a hood over my head. They took me into a shop and I could see their worried looks and hear them warning each other. We were in a public place and after all they were the guilty ones.

We crossed the and headed for Rangoon. They didn't cover my head again until we reached a place on the oustskirts of the capital. When the car came to a stop they pulled me out of the vehicle and, just lid before, they told me to bend down and jump over things. I obeyed the first time, but when they told me to jump over a ditch, I dragged my feet along the ground. Again my heart skipped a beat, as I couldn't see a thing. As I moved forward the ground gave way and I quickly withdrew my foot realising that there was a real ditch in front of me.

'What a clever boy!' one of the officers remarked. 'The first team must have given him a lesson. Well, we'll see how clever you are!'

They threw em into a room, stripped off my shirt and sarong and conducted a body search. They then ordered me to put my hands up inj the air while I was standing.

'Don't try to sit down without an order,' an officer told me.

I had to remain in this position with only my underpants on for about an hour. This method of torture seemed relatively harmless at first, but slowly my legs became stiff and numb and my arms started dropping. I couldn't hold out much longer and was about to collapse when one of the officers spoke.

'The people at this place know all about you. In fact, this place is responsible for your case, and it's here where we convert destructive elements like you.'

Before he finished his speech, I was trembling with rage. The officer continued, 'We know a lot about you. Even your leaders like U Aung Gyi and Min Ko Naing had to confess to what they knew once they were handed over to us here.'

I couldn't take it any longer and I shouted with rage, 'I'm not a destructive element!'

The officer slapped me across the face. 'Shut your fucking mouth! We're not here to listen to your lecture!'

'We're not destructive elements!' I shouted back, full of emotion. 'We're just fulfilling the wishes of the people.'

An officer hit violently acrossd the chest, but I continued, 'The destructive elements in society are those who go against the wishes of the people.'

I received another powerful and painful blow across my face and I felt blood hushing from my nose. The pain lingered and I suddenly dropped to the floor like a rice sack. I didn't lose consciousness and I tried to get up again. As soon as I got to my feet, I started shouting at my interrogators.

'You're brutal! Stop it! It's unfair to beat me likd this. We have the right to protect the interests of the country....'but I wasn't able to finish my sentence. All the officers in

the room started to beat, hit and kick me, while shouting at me, 'This is to protect the interests of the country!'

I think there were three or four of them and I remember that they beat me for a long time. At first, I tried not to show that I was hurt, but I soon began to let out painful cries each time I was hit. My whole body was in unbearable pain. I thought I stopped breathing, and from time to time I lost consciousness. Eventually I couldn't even utter a word. I don't know how long the assault went on for, but when they finally left me I lay motionless on the floor. I couldn't breathe and I was choking in my chest. I wished I were dead and I tried unsuccessfully to hold my breath so that I would die. Feeling wretched and in severe pain, I wondered how long I could stand such abuse.

The door clicked open and my torturers came back. They pulled me up off the floor and made me sit on a chair. Not knowing what they would do to me next, I shook with pain and fear. Then an officer spoke to me in a smooth, soft voice.

'Why did you let yourself get hurt? You're an educated person, so don't be foolish.

Beneath the soft and seemingly kind voice I sensed what was intended. I took the opportunity to ask for some water, but they only allowed me to put my clothes back on. They then commenced the questioning. The questions were mainly of a personal nature and there was neither hurriedness nor anger in the officer's voice. He wanted to know my opinion regarding the National Convention and I tried my best to satisfy him. When he was done, they all left the room. His final words before leaving the room were, 'you're the director of the play and we're the characters. If you want us to play rough we'll play rough, and if you play smooth and gentle we'll play in tune with you.'

After the session I felt something sinister was awaiting me. Just in case, I went over what I had told the interrogator with the gentle voice. After a while I became unsure of myself and wondered whether it was true that they knew everything about me. This thought was tormenting me, so I decided that I would stop worrying about it and instead take each question as it comes. I was still in a lot of pain, but I felt a bit better.

A while later they banged open the door and I soon realised they were going to play rough. As anticipated, they asked me a countless number of questions. They beat me whenever I hesitated answering them, they hit me when they thought I'd lied, and they punched me when I gave them the wrong answer. They used their hands, fists, feet, elbows and knees—every part of their body that can be used as a weapon in order to 'teach me a lesson'. At one point they forced me down on my knees and stepped on my face and jumped over my body. They did whatever they wanted to do to me and they were brutal beyond comprehension.

I was soaked with sweat, my face was sticky with blood and I was exhausted. I was wracked with pain and I couldn't concentrate. The pain was so great that I felt as though all my flesh had been torn from my body. I tried to meditate to lessen the pain, but it didn't work. Eventually I fell unconscious, into the darkness, and I lost touch with my pain. When I came round I found myself lying flat on my back and I had no idea how long I'd been in this state. My hood was gone but I was still handcuffed. My whole body was soaked with water and the floor was also wet. I realised they must have sprayed me with water.

I probed my face with my hands to see if any damage had been done and discovered that it was swollen. I was extremely thirsty, my heart was burning and my throat was bone dry.

'Water. Give me some water,' I shouted, but my palate was so dry I was unable to utter even a sound.

I then took the desperate decision to begin licking the water off the cement floor. It was not as easy as I thought and there was sand in the water. But it was worth a try and I soon felt mildly satisfied. I gave up after a while as I also realised that I was very weak and hungry.

To my horror, the door banged open again. I knew I couldn't survive this next bout of torture and I wanted to die to avoid the pain and the suffering. I heard some footsteps

but they were faint and soft. I was hoping the MIS would treat me better this time. I then heard one of the officers say. 'This guy's in bad shape. He might die.'

They pulled me up and sat me on a chair and I heard them arranging to change my clothes. I took the opportunity to ask for some water and they gave me a half-filled cup. I drank the water in a single gulp, felt relieved and regained some of my strength. I asked for some more water but they refused. A while later, they placed the hood back over my head.

There was another round questioning. The questions were similar and my answers became repetitive though always cautious. Some of my answers wrong and others were outright lies. Very often my interrogators knew that I was lying, and they would then attempt to ambush me with clever questions. It was a very thorough session, and I was lucky though, as they didn't punish me. Later I realised that there were two teams of interrogators; one team was tough and gave severe punishment when necessary, while the other team was gentle and asked questions without any punishment. It also could have been possible that it was the same group acting as both teams, but I never found out if this was the case.

The door banged open again. I immediately anticipated that something bad would happen to me for I knew that this was the turn of the tough team of interrogators. My whole body was swollen and I wasn't sure if I could take another round of torture. And they were surely going to torture me. I was trembling with fear and I tried to come up with something that would get me out of the physical abuse. Then an idea came to me. It was a change of tactics and I didn't know if it would work.

'Give me a ballpoint pen and a sheet of paper,' I said to them before they did anything to me. 'I'll write my confession for you.'

They were completely taken aback. They were supposed to be the tough team, sent in to beat me up. I was hoping my offer would now stop them torturing me.

'You're dead meat if you lie to us,' they warned me. They then took off my handcuffs.

'Take off the hood when we order you to,' they said, 'and put it back on when you hear the door open.'

They left the room and I waited for the order to take off the hood. After the order was given I removed the hood and for an instant I couldn't see anything. I was momentarily blinded and I blinked a number of times to familiarise myself with the surroundings. I finally saw a ballpoint pen and a stack of papers on the table. I wrote the account of the literary club case and for quite some time. I was free from the torture and pain. I was, however, fighting against severe thirst and drowsiness.

I heard the door open and I quickly put the hood back on. I was very worried by how my captors might respond to my confession. Then without warning, an officer kicked me from behind.

'Idiot! You don't know how to feel sorry for yourself!' he shouted.

I was thrown forward onto the table in front of me. MIS officers then pulled me up and tied my hands to a rope dangling down from the ceiling. They let me go and left me hanging by my arms. It felt as though my arms were almost detached from my body. I was terrified and in agony. They hit and slapped me on my face and then punched me in my chest. It was as though I was their punching bag. My drowsiness and thirst were long gone and all that I could feel was blow after blow, each of which brought cries of pain. I then passed in and out of consciousness and the pain came and went correspondingly.

I then hear the voice of the commander, 'Bring that bastard!'

The torture stopped and I realised they were bringing someone to meet me. I prayed to God that it was not someone I knew.

My prayers were not answered and I was shocked when I saw the person they had brought to me. He was a student soldier from Regiment 207 assigned to the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) office in Maesot, on the Thai-Burma Border. He had accompanied me back into Burma from Maesot. His face was also black and swollen; he was another tortured soul.

I instantly understood what it meant by bringing him to meet me. The MIS knew all about our operation and also knew that I had been lying to them. I sighed heavily and suddenly lost all resistance. The MIS then brought me a 38-page document that was my supposed confession. I wasn't allowed to read the document and was forced to sign the bottom of each page.

I was then transferred to Special Branch and subsequently charged with possession of illegal arms and with having contact with the ABSDF. The criminal court in Kyauktada Township, Rangoon, sentenced me to five years imprisonment for both charges, and I served my sentence at Cell 15, Hall 2 of Insein Special Prison. Needless to say, I was relieved that the nightmare at the Interrogation Centre was finally over.

## **A Dialogue With the Devil**

**By Moe Aye**

### **About the Author**

Moe Aye was born in Mandalay in 1964 and was a student at the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) throughout the 1988 prodemocracy uprising. During the uprising he joined the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and later joined the youth wing of the National League for Democracy (NLD). On the morning of August 9, 1988, the army shot at him while he was demonstrating near the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon.

He was arrested by Military Intelligence on November 7, 1990. Moe Aye was charged under Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Proviso Act and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment with hard labour. At the time of his arrest, he was working for the ABFSU and was also carrying out the duties of the NLD youth.

While in Insein Special Prison he met Mr. James Leander Nichols and learned how the honorary consul to four Scandinavian countries was being questioned and beaten by Military Intelligence. Moe Aye was released from Insein on November 22, 1996, and due to the harsh conditions in prison he had to seek intensive medical treatment.

Some six months later, Moe Aye left for Thailand and is now living there and working for the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF). He has written a number of articles about prisons and political prisoners in Burma.

On November 7, 1990, I went over to Myint Thu's apartment on 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Kyauktada Township, Rangoon, to sleep the night. Myint Thu was my classmate at the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and had finished his engineering degree. He had set up his own television and radio repair shop and he would sometimes help me with food,

clothing and a place to stay. When I arrived at Myint Thu's apartment, there was an elderly woman and a girl about 16 years old from up-country staying there.

'I think I should sleep outside tonight,' I told Myint Thu. 'I can see you have other guests here.'

'Don't worry,' he replied, 'they're my aunt and niece. They've never been to Rangoon and they want to see me. They'll sleep in the attic.'

I took a shower and lay in my friend's bed reading the book *Thebaik Hmauk Kyaing Tha*, The Student Boycotts, written by Thein Pe Myint. Myint Thu came into the room around 10pm and we discussed the current political situation. We were still talking at midnight when we heard someone knocking on the front door.

'We want to check the guest list!' Someone shouted.

Both of us looked at each other. We instantly knew it was the notorious military Intelligence service (MIS) at the front door and I sensed that the time that I had always dreaded had finally come.

Suddenly, I turned to Myint Thu. 'You only know me as an ordinary classmate,' I said. 'You don't know anything else about me.'

I was really worried about my friend who even though he had his own business, also helped people like me and therefore faced the possibility of being arrested by MIS. Myint Thu stared at me for few seconds and went to the front door. His aunt and niece were also woken up by the noise and we all watched Myint Thu as he moved toward the door. When he opened the door a man wearing a blue jacket and a blue Arakanese sarong pointed a pistol at Myint Thu, while a military corporal in uniform entered the apartment armed with a rifle.

'Where is Moe Aye?' the man in the blue jacket asked Myint Thu. 'I want to see him.'

'What's going on here?' Myint Thu replied.

The man in the blue jacket shouted back, 'Tell me what I asked you!'

More people then entered the room. Two military intelligence officers in plain clothes and three in holding G4 assault rifles.

'It's me, I'm Moe Aye,' I interrupted.

'Handcuff this mother fucker!' a plain-clothed officer ordered the man in the blue jacket. 'And carefully search the bedroom and the attic,' he continued.

'Why do I need to be handcuffed?' I asked. 'I haven't committed any crime.'

'Shut up! Do you want to die?' shouted one of the plain-clothed officers.

Two soldiers holding G4 assault rifles then came over to me and one of them twisted my arms behind my back and handcuffed me. I heard low sobbing coming from the attic and then some noises in the bedroom that sounded as though the soldiers had found something incriminating.

I turned and looked at my friend Myint Thu. I could clearly see sorrow and bitterness in his eyes. One of the plain-clothed men seemed to be the leader of the group and I later discovered that he was Captain Kyaw Zin Thet from Military Intelligence Unit 7(MI-7). He sat down in a chair in the living room.

'Put a hood over his head,' the captain ordered the three soldiers still in the room.

A soldier holding a rifle then placed a military green-coloured hood over my head. I could still hear their voices but I couldn't see anything. I could also hear the noise of military boots going up to the attic and Myint Thu's aunt crying. I was hoping that my friend Myint Thu wouldn't be arrested. If he was arrested, his aunt and niece, who had never been to Rangoon before, would be in trouble. The I heard Myint Thu's aunt weeping louder and louder.

'Please don't do anything to my friend,' I pleaded. 'He's an ordinary businessman. He's not a political activist.'

'Shut up,' aunt was crying and pleading with the officer, 'Please sir! My nephew is just a businessman. If he's guilty of something please tell me.'

I was then pushed out of the apartment by one of the soldiers and put into the back of a truck. I noticed that someone was sitting beside me in the vehicle. After that I heard some noises which sounded like someone was being forced into the truck and I thought it was my friend Myint Thu's aunt and niece would be suffering.

'Myint Thu, are you also in the truck?' I asked.

'You son of the bitch! Shut your fucking mouth!' someone shouted.

After driving for about 15 minutes the vehicle stopped. Someone ordered me to stand up in the truck and bow my head. They grabbed my shoulders and I was slowly pushed along. After taking five steps I was pushed out of the truck and felt my heart miss a beat as I fell on the hard ground. Someone pulled me up by my shoulders and shouted 'Stand up!' They then pushed me in the back to make me start walking. I waddled for about ten minutes, turning left and right many times, and was forced to bow my head again. I stooped when I hit a wall and my handcuffs were then removed, but I still had the hood over my head.

'Stand against the wall and hold your hands up!' came the order. The officers searched my clothes and my body. My sarong was also taken off. When they were satisfied with their search, I got my sarong back. One of them then twisted my hand and then told me to walk slowly. I had to bow my head many times and I walked like a blind man. The hood had been on my head for a few hours now and I felt like I could hardly breathe. I told them I was suffocating but they didn't answer. Instead they hit me violently across the head. After a few minutes walk I was taken into a room.

'When you hear someone knocking on the door,' I was told by an MIS guard, 'put the hood on your head. If you want to the toilet, knock on the door three times.'

The door to my cell then slammed shut. I kept quiet for a while and gave my hands a shake now that they were free of the handcuffs. I then took off the hood. The cell was about six feet by eight feet and the ceiling was quite high. There was one four-foot neon light on the ceiling and a two-foot neon light on the wall next to the door. There was also a big five-foot-long mirror beside the door, a small table and an ugly ten-inch-high wooden bed. I was sure this was one of the notorious MIS Interrogation Centres that I had been hearing about for such a long time. I sat on the bed and looked into the mirror while combing my hair back with my hand. Suddenly, I heard a voice from the mirror.

'Moe Aye what are you doing?'

I then realised that this was probably a one-way mirror. I didn't reply to the question, but instead sat down on the bed and tried to gather my thoughts. I wondered what kind of questions they could ask me and how I could best answer them in terms of the safety of my friend Myint Thu. A guard then knocked on the bed. Then I heard an angry voice.

'Don't you know to put the hood over your head when you hear knocking on the door?'

Finally, two MIS soldiers in plain clothes and military boots opened the door and ran to me. They covered my head with the khaki hood and kicked me six or seven times in my abdomen and on my shins.

'Remember mother fucker, next time I'll beat you more than that,' one of them said.

I was dragged out of the cell between the two soldiers. We walked for two minutes turning left and right many times and then we stopped. The two soldiers had stepped away from me for I could feel that both my hands were free. When I tried to step forward something like a wooden stick pressed into my stomach, and so I stepped back again. I couldn't hear anything. Everything was very quiet.

I thought I was in a big room and sensed that the MIS soldiers were watching me. I felt downhearted and angry, but more courageous than before. My shin, which had been kicked five minutes ago, suddenly became very painful. I tried to bend down

to massage my shin when suddenly I heard a very loud voice that seemed to come through a microphone.

'Hey you!'

I didn't know where the voice was coming from. My whole body was bathed in sweat, I felt suffocated, my leg was in pain and I was feeling very dizzy, as though my upper body was circling like a fan.

'SAIUTE!!' someone bellowed, and I heard the sound of soldiers standing to attention with their guns.

I guessed that one of the MIS officers had entered the room. Then I heard some footsteps and the sound of tables and chairs being moved. However, I wasn't able to judge whether they were in front of me or behind me. My palate became dry and my whole body was chilled from sweating too much. Ten minutes later, the MIS officer spoke in a slow and heavy voice.

'Rangoon is a big city with many people. Do you know why we have selected you, you mother fucker Moe Aye?'

While he was speaking I heard a few people move closer to me and I realised that the interrogation had begun. I told myself not to panic and I simply replied, 'Yes, I know.'

'Okay then, if you know, you should answer our questions correctly. If you try to tell lies, you will not get out of here. That's what you need to understand.'

'I have been brought here because I spoke the truth,' I told him. 'I have no lies to tell.'

'Mother fucker, we brought you here because you disturbed and destroyed the stability of the state. Hands up!'

Suddenly a soldier came behind me and pulled up my hands. 'Spread your legs,' the soldier ordered. Both my hands were raised and both my legs were spread. Two bamboo or wooden sticks were then placed between my feet so my legs would stay apart. I could feel the sticks touching my ankles. The MIS officer who had spoken before continued.

'What did you do in 1988?'

He was obviously referring to what I did during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. 'Nothing strange, I did what the people did.'

'NO! I am asking you which organisation you joined at the time and what you did in pushing the country into an abyss!'

'We never pushed the country into an abyss,'

'We never pushed the country into an abyss,' I replied. 'We did the right thing for the country.'

'Do you guys understand politics? You students are exploited by opportunist politicians, don't you know that? Tell me which organisation you joined in 1988.'

'Throughout our history, students have always been at the forefront of politics. Nobody forced me into politics. I joined the All Burma Federation of Student Unions.' Then I added, 'I'm thirsty, I'm suffocating and want to sit down.'

'If you want a drink, tell me the truth,' replied the MIS officer. 'Who are your closest friends in the ABFSU?'

I told him I knew all of them, and the truth,' replied the MIS officer. 'Who are your closest friends in the ABFSU?'

I told him I knew all of them, and the officer then became angry. 'I am asking you how many student leaders you know from the ABFSU!'

Then another voice interrupted, 'Don't be evasive, we only want to know the truth.'

I had to think quickly. If I told them the names of those I knew, my friends would soon be in trouble. 'Yes, I know Min Ko Naing-I met with him twice.' Min Ko Naing is the chairman of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and is serving a 20-year jail term. 'But for the others,' I continued, 'I can't remember their

names because I haven't seen them since joined the National League for Democracy which was a year ago.'

Both of my arms had been up in the air for a long time and were getting very tired. I tried to lower my arms a few inches but a soldier beat my left arm three or four times.

'Keep your hand up!' one of the soldiers said.

The officer continued, 'Did you know that Min Ko Naing has been manipulated by the Communist Party of Burma?'

'I know the mass of the students stand behind him,' I said, taking a risk.

'This guy seems to be stubborn,' said the officer slowly and heavily.

Just then both my ankles were stabbed with something sharp and the room became very quiet. I felt as if I were alone in the room. I tried to spread my legs a bit more to shake the stick between my feet and I heard the sound of something like a wooden stick drop onto the concrete floor. Then I heard footsteps coming towards me and someone hit me across the head. They continued to hit me about the head and I lost count of how many times I was struck. The stick was once again placed between my legs and someone told me not to move.

I was thirsty, my lips were dry, my legs were in pain and my arms, which had been up for a long time, were very tired. I can't explain how much I was suffering at that moment. I shivered and shook, and I wondered what had happened to my friend Myint Thu.

They asked me about my personal details. I couldn't remember how many questions they asked nor how many hours passed. My mouth had become so dry I could hardly speak any more.

'I can't be patient,' I shouted. 'I want to drink some water. I want to sit down.'

I heard my interrogators laughing.

'Democracy is expensive, isn't it?' said the officer whose voice was slow and heavy. 'Give him some water,' he ordered.

Then I heard a sound like someone saluting him and I thought the officer had probably left the room. Someone took away the stick from between my feet and the soldiers allowed me to lower both my arms. My khaki hood was then lifted to my nose and a cup was brought to my lips. I held the cup with both hands and began drinking crazily. But the cup was empty. I felt so angry and humiliated, but I couldn't speak or move.

'You must go back to your room,' one of the officers said.

I was carried by two soldiers back to my cell and the door was slammed shut. Everything was quiet again. I stood in front of the mirror and looked at myself. My face looked haggard and sunken like I hadn't slept for a week. My lips were completely dry and my nose was stained with blood. My head was also pounding like a huge hammer. I noticed that my left arm was painful and the skin on both my ankles was flayed and bleeding.

'Moe Aye, if you want a drink there's some water on the table,' said a voice from outside.

I turned and looked at the table and there was an old Seven-Up can. I picked up the can but it was only one-third full of water. I drank it all in a second, and didn't check whether the water was clean or not. Although it wasn't much to drink, I felt mildly satisfied and lay down on the wooden bed. However the bed was extremely uncomfortable. The wooden base was terribly rough and uneven, and the bed was too short for me and both of my legs dangled over the end and touched the concrete floor.

So I sat down in the bed and leaned against the wall. I didn't know what time it was. It was very quiet, I couldn't hear anything. Sometimes I could faintly hear telephones ringing and the sound of someone taking a shower. At the same time I didn't dare think about my friend Myint Thu and what may have happened to him. I fell asleep for a while and woke up when I heard someone knocking on the door. I immediately put the khaki hood over my head and sat waiting in silence.

Two MIS soldiers came in and pushed me out of my cell. I was frightened because I knew what I would have to face. I felt like someone who had lost all hope. My whole body was numb.

I was forced to face a wall and my khaki hood was taken off. Initially I couldn't see anything except the colour blue, and a few minutes later I realised that a soldier in military uniform was shining an electric light directly in my face. Beside me, I saw two large men in blue sports suits. Another man was in military pants but his upper body was naked and he was aiming a camera at me.

'Comb his hair a bit,' ordered the man with the camera.

When I lifted my hand to comb my hair, one of the two men in blue suits reached over and roughly brushed my hair. The room was quite big and the four walls were covered with blue curtains. There was no furniture. They took to my cell. On the way I gathered my thoughts. 'I am on the side of truth,' I told myself, 'I don't need to worry about anything.'

The door to my cell was slammed shut and once again I was able to take off my hood. That was always the most pleasant time for me and I will never forget that feeling of temporary freedom.

'Moe Aye,' said a voice from behind the mirror, 'if you want some food there's a meal on the table.'

I looked at the table and I saw some rice on an aluminium plate, some soup in a small aluminium cup and water in an old Seven-Up can. These must have been put in my cell while they were taking photos of me. That was my first meal since they were taking photos of me. That was my first meal since I was arrested, but I didn't know whether it was breakfast, lunch or dinner.

'What time is it?' I asked the mirror.

There was no answer. They did that on purpose. I then checked the meal carefully. There was some fried watercress on the rice, the soup had little pieces of gourd and the old Seven-Up can was half full of water. I tasted the watercress. 'Oh, Shit!' it was extremely salty. I tasted the soup and it was completely tasteless, just like boiled water. I drank all the water and then I felt like a smoke.

'Hey, I want a smoke.'

'You're not allowed to smoke, the commander has ordered it,' said a guard behind the mirror.

That guard should be commended for being so bloody obedient! I became more confident of myself and I asked again, 'I want to piss.' Again there was no answer. That's when I remembered what they told me when I was first arrived here.

'Knock, knock, knock,' I knocked three times on the door.

'What do you want?' the guard asked.

'I want to piss.'

'Put the hood on.'

A few seconds later I was taken out of my cell and we walked turning left and right as before. Then I was stopped and asked a question by someone who seemed to be standing in front of me.

'Moe Aye, didn't you go to Myadaung Monastery in Mandalay at the end of last month and in the first week of this month?'

'Let me piss first,' I said.

'It won't take more than three minutes to answer,' he replied, 'and if you answer correctly you can go and piss.'

Suddenly I was really angry, but I told myself to calm down.

'Yes,' I replied.

'Why did you go there? Which monks did you meet?'

'How could I have met the monks? So many of your soldiers guard the area and I have no business to meet with any monks. My responsibility was to the information department and to collect news, that's all.'

'Have you ever met with a monk called Yewata?' the officer asked.

'Never.'

'Did you write a report about what's been happening in Mandalay and send it to someone?'he continued.

I didn't want to answer this question,, and I knew that I had to be careful in what I said.'I really want to piss,'I replied.

'After this question you can, alright?'

'I never wrote any report for anyone, except for my NLD township office,that's all.'

'Did you ask students from the All Burma Basic Education Students' Union to deliver this report in Rangoon?'

'Look, I really want to piss, shall I piss here?' I said angrily.

Someone spoke behind me,'Let him go and piss.'Then I was forced to walk as before, turning left and right many times.'Step up slowly,'someone said. I stepped up two steps.'Okay, turn left,'one of them ordered. 'Make sure you piss directly into the pit, if not,you'll be beaten.'

I didn't care what might happen to me and I pissed. I had nearly finished when a guard shouted, 'Mother fucker! You're pissing everywhere!'

The guard then chopped his hand down on the back of my neck. I was so angry I tried to take the hood off and hit back at him. Then I heard footsteps.'What's going on here?'someone asked.They then hit me in the stomach and I noticed that my sarong was wet with my urine. Now every time I piss, I remember that beating. I was then forced to walk back again and I was taken to a room.

'Hands up!came the order.

I put both my hands in the air and my legs were spread wide apart. Like before, a wooden stick was placed between my feet and my ankles were in great pain.

'You asked student from the ABBESU to deliver this report, didn't you?'my interrogator asked me again.

'No, that's not true.' If I had said yes they would obviously ask me for the names of the students.

'Tell me truth, who did you ask to deliver this report?'

'I didn't ask anyone. When I was out of my office, I think the ABBESU students found the report themselves, made some photocopies and distributed it.'

There was silence for a few minutes.'You're a student, why did you join a political party instead of joining a student union?'asked someone whom I hadn't heard before.

I felt a little angry at the question. 'But even students who have only demanded student rights have been arrested. Where is Min Ko Naing? He's in prison,I said.'The election was held five months ago but the winning party which was voted in by the people has been denied power. That's why I joined a political party.'

I suddenly felt light-hearted, even though my back had been kicked and beaten I couldn't remember how many times. The wooden stick between my legs was removed and I was taken to another room. When we got there I heard something rolling over my head.

'Sit down,' they ordered,'and stretch out your legs.'

I felt a bit afraid. I was worried about what they would do to my legs. I sat on the concrete floor for quite a long time. My blood ran cold when I remembered what I had been told about the MIS interrogation Centres, that one form of torture was to roll a piece of rounded wood over a person's shins.

I told myself not to be too scared, but I was afraid of the torture. Then one of my legs was pulled up, and I felt terrified. Both my legs were placed on a piece of hard wood, and I then felt something like another piece of wood being placed on top and I heard the sound of iron chain. Suddenly I realised that I had been put in stocks. I tried to move my legs but I couldn't. then some hairs on my shin were plucked out. It was extremely painful and I cried out loud.

'This is very painful, but you guys say you want to save the country so you must be brave,' they mocked.

I was grateful to them because their comment encourage me to be proud and not to give in or be afraid of anything. I decided that be proud and not to give in or be afraid of anything. I decided that whatever they did to me, iwould never show them that I was scared.

It might be because of this decision that I ended up being in the Interrogation Centre for two months and three days. I was placed in stocks and sometimes I wasn't interrogated for days. I didn't know wheter it was night or day and I only had the opportunity to shower twice. I was fed twice a day and the food was always the same tasteless soup and fried salty vegetables, though sometimes I found tiny pieces of fish on my rice. Sometiemes I heard the sounds of people being interrogated like me.

On day, I was taken from my stocks to a different place. I was asked questions while I was forced to stand and sometimes I was beaten.

'what do you think of the SLORC?' I was asked.

'It allowed elections to be held, but it hasn't yet transferred power to the winning party.'

'Do you think we should tarnsfer power to the NLD?'

'You have already asked that of the people of Burma in the election,' I replied.

'Do you agree with the idea that a country can only be developed when the army is strong?'

'I don't think there's any country without an army.'

I was also asked about Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.'What do you know of Saddam Hussein?'

'He's the military dictator who invaded Kuwait.'

'Do you know why Saddam is able ot challenge the United States and its allies?'

'He must be a fool or he's pretending he's not afraid,' I replied.

'Don't you support Saddam?'

'I'm not able to comment on the problems faced by other countries. I can only talk about my country's problems.' I actually wanted to say that I didn't support Saddam, but I was too weak to argue and I feared what would happen if I disagreed.

'Saddam is supported by the people of Iraq. His army is very strong and that's why he can challenge the United states and its allies. Our top army leaders are also trying to build up a strong army in Burma, but not for the oppression of the people. Do you understand?'

'At the moment, I'm in an Interrogation Centre. Look at my ankles and my injuries. I'm not even allowed to see the faces of my interrogators.'

I was also asked a lot of questions about the National League for Democracy and Daw aung San Suu Kyi .

'Between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,'I replied.

'Do you know her history?'

'I don't think I need to know about it.'

'why do you support her?'

'She hasn't done any harm to the country.'

'Her husband is English. The English colonised our country.'

'But Michael aris didn't colonise Burma,'I replied.

'Do you know that NLD Members of Parliament have bad moral charater?'

'The people elected them.'

I was asked many negative questions regarding Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, and many positive ones about Saddam Hussein. The main target of the questions and the accusations against me were that I was actively involved in the August 1988 uprising and the supposed 'disntegration' of the country. I was forced to confess to burning a car in front of the Rangoon Institute of Technology and breaking into a barber shop at Hledun junction during the 1987 demonitization demonstration.

In addition, I had to confess to sending ABBESU students to jungle areas controlled by armed resistance groups, and encouraging students to deliver anti-government letters and pamphlets. I was also forced to confess to being involved in the Buddhist monk pro-democracy movement in Mandalay.

During my time at the Interrogation Centre, I experienced a strange event three weeks before I was transferred to Insein Prison. One day when I was in the stocks I heard many voices not far from where I was. Someone was speaking slowly in English.

'You arrange a bed here for him, don't feed him the food from here, buy fried noodles or something from outside.'

I recognised the voice as that of one of the MIS officers who interrogated me the first time. 'Wan Phu Wai, what would you like to eat?' someone asked him slowly in English.

'Nothing,' came the faded reply.

Over the next few days, an interpreter and Wan Phu Wai were speaking to each other in Chinese, so I thought this person must be from China or a Chinese student. I heard the MIS officer give instructions to the interpreter.

'Tell him to eat something. We have to wait and see if he will be repatriated back to China. We are waiting for orders from General Saw Maung and General Khin Nyunt.'

I heard people speaking in Chinese and Burmese. 'Major, he said that if you guarantee not to send him back to China, he will eat,' said the interpreter. 'Otherwise he wants to be sent to the United States or Taiwan.'

I thought that the major might be Major Hla Than who interrogated me when I first arrived here. 'Tell him I was ordered by my boss to wait for two or three days, but that he should eat something,' the major said.

Then I heard more talking in Chinese. The interpreter told the major, 'He said he wants a guarantee from you not to send him back to China. To get this guarantee from you, he wants to meet someone from the United States Embassy or the British embassy.'

'Okay, tell him to eat something today. I'll get a reply tomorrow. If he doesn't eat, put the food on his table. I later heard the sound of a car starting and soldiers standing to attention with their guns.'

I guessed that Wan Phu was about 20 years old. The next day it sounded like he was being taken somewhere, for I heard him refusing something. 'No, no, no,' he was saying. I also heard someone shout in English, 'Who is Wan Phu Wai? What is he?' but I didn't catch what they were talking about.

Later in Insein Prison, I asked some Chinese prisoners about Wan Phu Wai. They said that Chinese who are charged with illegal entry into Burma are interrogated by local police officers and immigration officers and are then sentenced and sent to prison. After their release, the Chinese Embassy comes and picks them up and sends them to the China-Burma border or inside China. However, they are never sent to MIS Interrogation Centres. I therefore guessed that Wan Phu Wai must have been one of the students involved in the Tiananmen Square movement, or involved in political activities in China.

When I was placed in the stocks it was impossible for me to sit comfortably. The stocks were about two feet from the ground, making it difficult for me to sit with my feet up so high. The distance between the stocks and the wall was only four feet which was not enough for my legs to stretch out. I therefore had to bend my knees all the time. When I wanted to lean against the wall I had to put my hands behind me on the floor. However, I wasn't able to lean comfortably back against the wall, as only my head

was able to reach the wall. In addition, whenever I bent forward I got tired very quickly, and my legs were in such tight holes in the stocks that I couldn't move them even a little bit.

The worst problem for me was that where I was sitting was also the path to the toilet for the other people who were being interrogated at the Centre. Whenever they went to the toilet I had to bend forward to let them pass. However their heads also were covered with hoods, so I could only hear them coming. Whenever they passed they would accidentally hit me with their knees or their feet because they would accidentally hit me with their knees or their feet because they couldn't see where they were going. When they came back from the toilet I noticed that where I was sitting would become wet with either water or urine.

After being in the stocks for one week without being interrogated, both my legs felt extremely painful. Sometimes the soldiers would pull hairs from my shins, but I couldn't feel anything. When I wanted to go to the toilet, I had to call the soldiers four or five times because I didn't know where they were and I couldn't see them with the hood still over my head.

Whenever I got up to go to the toilet, I felt agonising pain in my legs. When the soldiers unlocked the stocks, I would try to stand up but my legs wouldn't move properly. They felt numb and every time I stood up I had to massage my legs with both my hands. I wasn't able to walk immediately because it took a few moments for my blood to circulate properly.

I was always beaten whenever I wanted to go to the toilet because I tried to control myself as much as I could, and I tried to drink less water so I wouldn't urinate as much. Sometimes the soldiers would force me to drink more water than I was able to. Later in Insein Prison I found out from others who were interrogated at MI-7 at the same time as me that I was forced to drink a lot when other political prisoners didn't have enough water to drink. It was worst when I was forced to drink a lot of water before my meals, as this meant that I was unable to eat all the food.

One day I was taken from my stocks and walked around, and someone started asking me questions.

'Moe Aye, your friend Myint Thu told us that you had contact with Shwe Htee.'

'I don't know Shwe Htee. This is the first time I've ever heard this name.'

The officer continued, 'Why are you telling us lies? Your friend has already confessed.'

'I really don't know this person,' I replied. 'If you don't believe me, bring Myint Thu here and ask me in front of him.'

Someone interrupted and threatened, 'Tell us the truth or your life will be ruined. It's better for you to tell us before we get angry.'

I realised that they would torture me further if I didn't co-operate, and I was really afraid.

The second officer who interrupted said, 'Two young men who were sent by Shwe Htee contacted you at your NLD township office, isn't that right?'

My situation was not looking good. It was true that these two young men came to my office but Shwe Htee had not sent them. They were from upper Burma and we only discussed legitimate political activities. If I told them the true story, they would surely ask me who these two were and where they were from. These two young men would then be arrested. So I had to be very cautious with my answer.

'I don't know Shwe Htee and no young men came to see me,' I answered.

'Moe Aye, don't try to lie. We have already arrested these two young men. What did you discuss?'

I knew the MIS were trying to trap me, but the fact was that I didn't know Shwe Htee. There was a moment of silence and I tried again, 'I don't know anything and I have had no connection with these two young men.'

'If they were not sent by Shwe Htee, which organisation were they from?' the officer asked me again.

I guessed that these two young men hadn't actually been arrested. That's why I decided to try to protect them. I repeated, 'No one came to me at that time.'

Suddenly, a guard kicked me behind my knee. I collapsed on the floor on my knees. When I tried to stand up, I was forced to lie on my stomach and both of my hands were pulled behind my back and I was handcuffed. The hood was still over my head and I was lying face down on the floor. Suddenly, my sarong was taken off. I wasn't wearing any underwear and my lower body was completely naked.

'You have thirty minutes to consider whether or not you are telling lies, and to think about your life,' one of the officers said.

There was nothing but silence.

I don't want to describe what followed because I don't even want to think about it. However, I know it's important the world knows what I experienced and what is happening in MIS Interrogation Centres in Burma.

A voice broke the silence. 'Moe Aye, think carefully and tell us the truth. If you don't, we will make you a homosexual.'

Someone then sat on top of me. Another took off my handcuffs, pulled both of my hands forward and handcuffed me again. I was about to be raped by another man. I was absolutely terrified as I expect anyone would be in such a situation.

'You're so cruel! How can I remember these two men among all the people who came to my office at that time!' I pleaded.

'Why didn't you tell us this before!' the officer shouted. 'I knew you were fucking stalling all the time! Who came into your office? What are their names?'

'Let me put my sarong on first, then I will tell you everyone I met in my office.'

'Tell me now,' he replied, 'I have no time.'

I told the MIS several names, some of which were not real. I explained that I didn't know where some of the people were staying, and for the others I told them the wrong townships. I explained that we only discussed the monks' boycott in Mandalay and the NLD's Gandhi Declarations. However, they weren't satisfied with my answers and seemed a little confused.

'Didn't you discuss urban terrorist activities?'

I guessed the MIS had calculated that the two young men who were sent by Shwe Htee had discussed urban terrorism with me. Otherwise they wanted to know whether I had contact with Shwe Htee. The other possible reason was that the MIS thought that I had some kind of connection with urban terrorism, they would use it as propaganda against the NLD. That's why I replied that I had no connection with armed resistance groups in the jungle and never discussed urban terrorism.

The man who was sitting on top of me then got up. I was given back my sarong and allowed to get up.

'Take him back to his room,' an officer ordered, 'I'll call him again later.' He then turned to me and threatened, 'We'll know whether your answers are correct or not within a couple of days. If they aren't, prepare yourself to become a homosexual instead of a politician.'

I was put back in the stocks and felt nervous and afraid of the threat. If the two young men were arrested, both them and I would be in trouble. The best I could do was to give the MIS evasive answers.

During my days in the stocks, the MIS tortured me psychologically. One day, when I wanted to smoke after my meal, I asked the guard for a cheroot. The guard agreed and told me to wait a minute until he returned. A few minutes later he came back with a short cheroot and handed it to me saying, 'Here you are, but you'll have to light it yourself.' He then walked away.

I hoped that there were other soldiers around me but I couldn't see with the hood still over my head. 'Excuse me!' I asked a number of times, 'Does anyone have a light?' Finally, I lifted the hood up to my nose and sucked on the short cheroot even though I didn't have a light.

Another day, two soldiers came up to me. 'Hey! Moe Aye,' one said, 'Do you know U Mountg Ko from your NLD party? He died in an Interrogation Centre. You should think carefully and answer the questions correctly. Then you will be sent home.'

I didn't reply, however later when I was transferred to Insein Prison I found out that U Maung Ko had actually died in an Interrogation Centre.

One day I was taken out of the stocks and led to a different place. I was ordered to sit on a wooden chair with both my hands handcuffed together and to the chair.

A voice in front of me began the interrogation. 'Moe Aye, we know that you asked the ABBESU students from Kyauktada Township to deliver copies of a propaganda letter in town. Who wrote the letter? Who funded you? And where were these letters printed?'

I didn't expect this. I thought they would ask me about Shwe Htee and the two young men, but they caught me off guard with the question about the letters and I didn't know how to answer. Because I didn't answer immediately the soldiers started hitting me over the head. They then read out the letter we distributed in town and asked me who helped me with the letter.

'I wrote the letter myself and I used my own money.'

'That's impossible. You couldn't do it all yourself,' the officer replied. 'Do you know how to write on wax paper for a gestetner? And where did you photocopy the letter?'

'I wrote on the wax-paper myself and I also did the copies myself which I printed by hand using a fluorescent light as a roller and gestetner ink.'

'Okay, take him to a room and let him write on some wax-paper and make photocopies the way he just said,' the officer ordered.

This was now a huge problem for me. Although I know how to make photocopies with a fluorescent light and gestetner ink, I actually can't write on gestetner wax paper. It was a friend of mine who did for several minutes. After that I heard at least two people come into the room and move the table and chair.

'Everything is on the table for your wax-writing and photocopies,' someone said. 'When you've finished, knock on the door and cover your head with the hood, understand?'

I heard the door slam shut. Although I had the chance to take off my hood, I was shaken by the thought that I had to do something that I had never attempted before. I took off the hood and looked around the room. There were a lot of things for writing on gestetner wax paper on the table. All I knew was that someone who was not an expert in wax writing could easily tear the wax paper if they attempted to write on it.

I started to panic and tried to calm myself, but I couldn't. Finally I decided to face whatever would happen to me. I covered my head with the hood and knocked on the door.

'Have you finished?' a soldier asked.

'I have something to tell you,' I replied as I heard the door open and at least two people come in.

'What's the matter?' One of them said.

'You didn't write anything on the wax paper!' Shouted another.

'Honestly, I can't write on wax paper. I was afraid that the person who wrote on the paper for me would be arrested.'

'Okay, don't worry,' one of them said. 'We won't do anything to you, just tell us who wrote on the wax-paper for you.'

'I paid one of the shops on Pansodan Road to do it and they wrote it for me.'

'There are so many fucking shops on Pansodan Rosd!' a soldier shouted angrily. 'Tell me which one!'

'I can't remember the name of the shop, I was very busy at the time.'

'Mother fucker!' 'Why didn't you tell us that that before? Take him back to the captain,' one of them ordered.

After walked just a short distance one of them said, 'Captain, this guy is being evasive.'

'Moe Aye, if you want to get out of here as soon as possible, tell us the truth,' said the captain, whose voice was familiar. He was Captain Kyaw Zin Thet who arrested me in Mint Thu's apartment. 'We have full authority here and we can do anything to you.'

'I really can't remember the name of the shop. Captain you know about the shops in Pansodan Road. There are so many of them and they're always crowded. Many people were doing wax-writing and typing on the pavement for money. I was telling lies to you because I couldn't remember the location of the shop or its name, that's why.'

'You didn't only lie to us about the two young men, but also about who wrote on the wax-paper,' the captain replied. 'It sounds like you want to find out about the water room. Send him to the water room.'

I had no idea what the water room was, but I was sure it was a brutal place. I was taken to another room in the Centre and put in a chair. The chair was not an ordinary wooden one, but felt as though it was made of bricks and cement. It was very quiet in the room. I then heard some voices and it sounded as if someone was being interrogated in the next room.

'It isn't!' I heard a soldier shout. 'Draw a correct map!'

'It's true, I drew a correct map,' someone was pleading.

There were a few seconds of silence and suddenly I heard someone scream, 'Ahhh!!...I'm suffocating!!...I'm dying!!'

I was petrified. I didn't know how they were torturing him but I heard his screams of agony for nearly 30 minutes. Then I heard the soldier taken him out of the room. I had been badly shaken by the screams. It was silent again and I started to feel cool, as if the room was air-conditioned. I felt some drops of water slowly dripping on my head which was still covered by the hood. A few seconds later the drops quickened and then slowed again. I tried to move from the chair.

'Sit down and don't move, mother fucker!' someone shouted.

At the same time I heard someone running over to me and was suddenly hit in the abdomen four or five times. Before I was arrested I had been told about a type of water torture and I was now terrified of what was to sometimes it would slow to droplets. This, however, was different to the torture I had been told about, and my hood was now soaked through. I began to suffocate and I felt like I was drowning. I then started to scream like the person I'd heard not long ago.

It was worse than drowning because I couldn't move. My hands were still handcuffed and a soldier, who was standing between my legs, was pressing down on my shoulders. My head was also being held still. They were asking me questions at the same time, but the more they tortured me, the more I suffocated and the more I screamed. I can't remember how or if I answered their questions. One thing I was sure about, I cried and pissed in my sarong.

When they took off my hood, I noticed that I was in the same room where they took the pictures of me. My clothes were soaking wet. An officer in plain clothes combed my hair with his hand, while another in military uniform told me not to move. He then photographed me. I noticed that they had taken off my handcuffs. After that they didn't use the hood again and my eyes were instead covered with a thick khaki-

coloured cloth which was shaped like a pair of glasses. I was then sent back to the stocks with my wet clothes on.

When I was back in the stocks I started to shiver from my wet clothes. I didn't know what I had told them during the water torture when I lost control, and consequently I didn't know what to say when they questioned me next time.

'Moe Aye, it'd be better if you take off your shirt and squeeze the water out,' someone said in a soft voice. 'How many days have you been here?'

'I don't know how many days. I took my shirt off and squeezed it out.'

'Do you think it's day or night?' the officer continued.

'I don't know what hot water?'

He laughed in a victorious tone. 'I think you must be very cold, would you like some hot water?'

'Yes, if possible,' I answered.

The officer left and came back about three minutes later. 'Here you are,' he said as he held my hands and gave me a cup.

I immediately realised the cup was very cold and then shouted. 'Why would we give hot water to someone like you who pushed the country into an abyss? Someone who relies on the support of foreigners rather than Burmese!'

One of them grabbed the cup from my hands and poured the ice-cold water over my head. My whole body felt very cold but I wasn't able to protest, as I knew what would happen to me if I did. I wanted to sort out what I should tell them if they asked me questions again, but I was unable to do so. The MIS were constantly making threats to me and gloating about the death of U Maung Ko and how they tortured him.

After the water torture, they started asking me the same questions over and over again regarding my personal details. Different officers would come and ask me the same questions while I was in the stocks, and I could hardly bear if any longer. Sometimes I was beaten while they were questioning me.

I guessed it had been several hours since I'd been back from the water room and I hadn't been fed yet. Although I hadn't eaten, I wasn't hungry and I guessed that my fear must have been suppressing my appetite. I was, however, thirsty all the time. Whenever I asked for some water, the guards would ignore me. However after five or six requests for some water I was finally given a drink. Later, when I wasn't thirsty, they would swear at me and force me to drink up to five cups of water. When my clothes finally dried out through my body heat, I started to feel sick and sneezed a lot.

'Can I have some medicine?' I asked the guard who brought me some food. 'I feel sick.'

'This is not a clinic,' he replied. 'It's no loss if someone like you dies here. Are you scared you're going to die?'

When we were talking I could see the concrete floor and the guard's knees and feet through a gap at the bottom of the blindfold. I wasn't allowed to take the blindfold off when I ate my meal, so it was very difficult for me to eat.

'Moe Aye, here's your rice and curry, but be careful,' the guard said, 'the fish is full of tiny bones.'

While I was eating, other prisoners passed me on their way to the toilet and I got tired of having to constantly move out of the way.

Sometimes the soldiers would come up to me and say, 'Get ready Moe Aye, you will be interrogated soon.'

Whenever I heard that, I would get very nervous and my body would shiver. However, most of the time they were just threatening me, and they didn't take me from the stocks. My clothes were filthy and I wasn't allowed to wash my face. I showered twice during my interrogation. I was allowed to take off my blindfold in the bathroom, but I couldn't see out anywhere because the bathroom was completely shut off.

One day I was taken out of the stocks and was being led somewhere when an MIS officer, who sounded like Captain Kyaw Zin Thet, started speaking to me. 'Moe

Aye, we didn't find those two young men where you said they'd be. Tell me their real names and where they're staying.'

At the time I had expected a question about the wax writing and photocopies of the letter. I didn't want to answer his question and they knew that I was hesitating.

'Hands up! Spread your legs!' the captain ordered.

I did what he said. 'I only know what they told me,' I replied.

'How can I know where they're staying? They didn't give me their real address.'

'Well, you should try to guess where they're staying and give me their real names.'

Captain Kyaw Zin Thet said. 'By the way I've bought a new motorbike for you. You can ride it and search for them in Rangoon. If you don't find them there, you can go on to Pegu and Mndaly.' He then ordered one of the soldiers, 'Teach him how to ride a motorbike and search for these young men. After that, report back to me.'

Although this was a new torture for me, I had heard about it a long time ago.

'This bike is brand new,' the soldier was saying, 'that's why it's powerful and sounds very loud.' He then imitated the sound of a motorbike. 'But you have to obey the rules and regulations of the road. When a traffic light turns red you must stop but you don't need to turn off the engine. That's when the bike makes a sound like this,' and he made the sound of an idling engine. 'When a traffic light turns green your bike increases speed, do you follow me?' and he made the sound of a motorbike at full speed. 'Bend your knees,' another soldier said, 'and your hands must be in this position,' he continued as he grabbed my hands and held them out as if they were holding onto the bike's handlebars. 'Okay, start the engine,' he ordered. 'You don't need to change gears as this is an automatic. Head downtown from your NLD Kyauktada office and search for the two men.'

Suddenly I was beaten across the buttocks with a cane stick. 'I've already told you,' I said, 'I don't know anything about them.'

'Find them first. Come on! Go! Go!'

I made the sound of a motorbike and when a soldier said I was at a red traffic light and that I had to stop I made an idling sound. The soldiers then ordered me to either stop or go as they pleased. Sometimes when I couldn't respond quickly enough, I would be beaten with the cane stick. Finally, my knees got so tired squatting in the motorbike position that I fell on the floor out of pain and exhaustion. I was so exhausted that I couldn't make the motorbike sounds any more and I couldn't stand up.

'Have you found them?' one of them asked.

I didn't reply. I only wanted to lie on the floor. I was thirsty and asked for some water, but I didn't get any.

I was then taken back to the stocks. Several minutes later I was asked, 'Moe Aye, do you think you can write down your signature without removing the blindfold?'

'Whatever you say, but you must sign these papers,' the guard continued. 'Take him into the room.'

Another guard interrupted, 'You can have some water after you sign these papers.'

I stood up and walked slowly into the room. The soldiers closed the door and left me alone in the room. 'Take off your blindfold,' someone ordered from outside. 'All the papers are on the table. Read them and sign each page. If you refuse to sign, you will be here for long time, and die here also.'

I took off the blindfold and realised that I was in the room where I first stayed. I checked the papers on the table. There were about seven pages and all were photocopies. The first page was my biography and my photo was attached. The second page said that I took part in 'the 1988 riots', and that after the coup by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) I distributed anti-SLORC leaflets and defamed the regime. The papers also said that I took a position in the Information Department of the NLD's Kyauktada Township office, and at the same time had contact

with illegal and underground organisations during the May 1990 election. The papers also accused me of exploiting young ABBESU students by urging them to join armed jungle groups, and that I had confessed in writing to these matters.

I had to sign all of these pages. The last paragraph meant that I confessed to all of the above mentioned facts and that no one threatened or pressured me into signing the papers. I didn't know what other people had done in the same situation. I had two options-sign or stay in the Interrogation Centre. But quite frankly, my resistance had all but run out. However, I could protect the two young men, as well as my friend who wrote on the wax paper and made the photocopies for me. When I finally signed the papers, I felt very sad. I lay on the small wooden bed in the cell, thirsty and tired from pretending to ride the motorbike.

'Moe Aye, cover your eyes. Two or three soldiers came in to the room and I was taken back to the stocks. One of them then put a can of water in my hands.

After I signed the papers, I wasn't interrogated for several days. However, I was psychologically tortured. The worst thing for me was going to the toilet. Pissing was not a big problem, but whenever I went to toilet I wasn't allowed to take off the blindfold. I was always taken to the toilet by guards, and I knew that the toilet door was always open. If my excrement didn't go directly into the pit I would be beaten again and again. Sometimes when I took too much time, the soldiers would shout, 'Hey! I know you're thinking how to escape from here! Hurry up, mother fucker!' It's for these reasons that I had great difficulty in going to the toilet, and I was able to shit only five times during the two months I spent in the Interrogation Centre. Another difficulty was trying to clean myself with water after I went to the toilet. I firstly couldn't see anything with the blindfold on, and sometimes there wasn't enough water in the container to clean myself. The guards would always swear at me, 'All of you mother fuckers never clean the toilet properly,' and I would be hit across the head three or four times. Later I became constipated and suffered as a result.

One day when I was in the stocks a political prisoner was taken in to a room behind me. I then heard the stocks a political prisoner was taken and beaten for several hours. I thought the man was probably a newcomer. After the interrogation, someone ordered, 'Get Toe Toe Htun out of the room. I was worried about him, but I couldn't do anything. A couple of days later Toe Toe Htun was moved somewhere else.

Once one of the political prisoners hit me as he was on his way to the toilet. Although I tried to bend forward as much as I could to let him pass, we were both blindfolded and couldn't see each other. A guard then beat me for not making room for the prisoner, and the prisoner was also beaten for not knowing I was there.

The day after that I heard the sounds of an interrogation in the room behind me.

'What is your name?' someone asking.

'Thein Lwin,' the man answered.

Thein Lwin replied, 'The National League for Democracy. I'm in charge of organisers in Pegu Division.'

'What! A fucking organiser?' the soldiers said. They then beat and tortured him and I felt nervous as I was in the same situation.

One day when I was still in the stocks, an officer came up and asked me my name and I answered him.

'When did you get here?' he continued.

'November the seventh.'

He asked me if I was able to guess when it was day and when it was night.

'If it's colder, then that's night time.'

He then spoke to a guard in a compassionate tone, 'take him to an available room, it is too tiring for him to stay in the stocks.'

I was then moved into a room.

One of the guards later asked, 'Moe Aye, feel free to sleep or do whatever you like. By the way do you want a smoke?'

I said I did and a guard opened the door and put a cheroot in my hand. I took off the blindfold and checked it, as I was wary from what happened the last time that I asked for a smoke. This time it was a real new cheroot, its brand name was Joe Thein and it was already alight. I smoked the cheroot right down to its filter. I then lay down on the rough bed and stretched out my legs. I could hear the low murmur of a television. I then fell asleep.

I didn't know how many hours I had slept when I was suddenly woken by someone shaking me and shouting at me to get up. My eyes were already covered by a blindfold.

'Mother fucker!' 'You're going to die now that we know you lied to us!' the soldiers were shouting.

I was gripped by a wave of fear. The soldiers grabbed me and took me somewhere.

'You asked for some medicine from a guard, didn't you?' an officer asked.

'Yes, but I'm okay now.'

'I want to tell you that no prisoner has any right to medical treatment here. That's all, okay take him back to his room.'

I was initially very scared, but then I felt very angry. However, I wasn't sent back to my room, but back to the stocks.

'Excuse me,, your officer had already allowed me to stay in the room,' I tried to explain to the guard. 'Please send me back to the room.'

I heard them laughing. 'You're here to be interrogated, not to sleep.'

I noticed a strong smell of whisky, so I didn't complain anymore. I fell asleep again even though I was in the stocks. I was awoken when someone hit me in the back and I thought it was a prisoner going to the toilet so I bent forward. However, a guard was unlocking the stocks.

'I think this guy will die here,' he mumbled to himself.

I was then taken somewhere else and ordered to sit down on the floor with both of my legs stretched out.

'Moe Aye, there is still some confusion,' an officer said in soft tone. 'We want to ask you some questions again, and for you to answer correctly and tell us as much as you can remember.'

My sarong was then lifted to my knees and a rounded stick was placed on both my shins. I was really afraid. I thought they wanted to know more about the two young men and the wax-writing.

'Moe Aye,' the officer continued, 'do you know John Htin Aung?' I was surprised by the question and didn't expect it. I had no time to prepare an answer.

'Yes, I met him one or two times, but we don't know each other that well,' I answered. That was actually the truth. John Htin Aung was working in the United States embassy in Rangoon but I only met him on a couple of occasions.

'How did you meet him?'

'I met him in Rangoon General Hospital the day after the army gunned down pro-democracy demonstrators in 1988.'

'Moe Aye, do you know what's on your shins?' the officer threatened. 'How many times did you meet with him and where did you meet? Think carefully and tell me the truth.'

It was difficult for me to remember the exact details, however I believed that the MIS wanted to level more accusations at me. When I tried to think what would be the best answer, I suddenly felt terrible pain from my shins. Because of the excruciating pain, tears rolled down my cheeks, though I wasn't crying.

'I met John Htin aung once at Mr. Martin's residence,' I answered. Mr Martin also worked at the United States embassy and had a position in the Economics section.

'Think carefully. You met at other places, didn't you?' The stick on my shins was pressed down harder.

Apart from the hospital, I had actually only met him once at Mr. Martin's place. But my interrogators didn't believe me. 'It's true! I'm not lying!' I pleaded.

But they ignored me and I felt more pain as they pressed down on my shins again. When I screamed, the officer asked why I was crying out so loud and again pressed the stick down on my shins. Then when I tried to control my screaming, the officer said that I had good resistance and pressed down more and more. I didn't know how to deal with this officer and I felt desperate.

'I really only met him once,' I mumbled.

Suddenly everything was quiet. The stick was still on my shins and someone was still holding it. The longer the silence, the more I felt scared. 'What are they going to ask me now?' I was thinking to myself. 'And how can I answer them?' I heard someone moving gently about the room. My legs had been stretched out for a long time and they were getting tired. When I couldn't hear the footsteps anymore I tried to raise my knees a little. I then felt the stick roll freely down my shins, and I spread both my legs out and waited to see what would happen next. There was still silence. I wasn't sure if anyone was still in the room, but I gradually bent and stretched my legs four or five times with the stick down at my ankles. I stretched out my legs again and I was suddenly hit across the shoulder.

'Hey you! Do you think we don't know what you're doing? The officer shouted. 'We're watching you all the time. You guys take too much advantage of every little opportunity. The next time you move your legs, you will be sorry for the rest of your life!'

I once again felt very scared and the room grew silent a second time. I didn't dare to move my legs although I noticed the stick had been removed from my shins. What felt like a few hours later, my handcuffs were taken off and I was given some food.

'Today's dish is fried bean curd and green sprouts,' the guard said. He then asked, 'We've fed you every meal, haven't we?'

I actually couldn't remember how many times I'd been fed. The problem was I didn't know whether it was day or night. Sometimes they fed me two meals in a short period of time, and sometimes they interrogated me for several hours without feeding me. At other times I felt beyond hunger due to the torture and interrogation. They also sometimes forced me to drink a lot of water before I ate. If I explained all this to the guard I was sure I would be beaten. That's why I avoided directly answering the question and just said, 'I haven't been able to eat much because I've been very tired.'

The guard then started shouting at me, 'I want to know from you whether or not we've fed you every meal.'

'No, you've never missed a meal,' I replied with despair.

'What about drinking water?' the guard continued.

'You always give me drinking water as well.'

'Mother fucker!' the guard shouted. 'All you guys say 'Yes, fine' when you're here, but you say different things behind our backs!'

He then hit me twice in the chest. I was always beaten whatever I said, whether they liked the answer or not. After I ate I wasn't given any water, but I was taken somewhere else to answer more questions.

'Moe Aye, what did you discuss with Martin at his house?' I was asked by whom I thought was Captain Kyaw Zin Thet.

'Nothing much,' he asked me whether the students were united.'

'The captain continued, 'Didn't you ask for some help?'

'I didn't ask him for help and he didn't ask me any other questions,' I replied truthfully.

'John Htin Aung told me that I met with Mr. Martin, but didn't ask him for any help.'

They were not satisfied with my answers and one of them asked, 'Are you left or right-handed?'

I wasn't sure why they were asking me this. 'I'm right-handed.'

'Take his handcuffs off,' someone ordered.

They took off the handcuffs and the whole room became quiet again. Whenever there was silence I became very scared. To calm myself, I massage my free wrists. My body felt not and cold and someone's voice suddenly broke the silence.

'You said you didn't ask for any help from Martin. Then why did you go and meet him at his residence?' the captain asked. 'How do you know Martin? Didn't you meet him again in Mandalay in this year?'

'I met him only once. I don't know how he knew me,' I answered.

Suddenly my right hand was pulled into the air and something arm was twisted and pulled behind my back. I felt I was now in some kind of danger and my mind was focussed on my right hand.

'What do you think of the United States Government?'

I couldn't say what I really wanted to say, as I was sure I would be beaten. 'I don't know too much about the United States,' I replied. 'I just know it's a large democratic country. I haven't really studied it.'

'Why did you meet with Martin without knowing anything about the United States?' one of them said loudly. 'You admire the United States don't you? You guys always look for help from the West rather than working together with us. The officer then spoke for several minutes about how bad the United States Government is.

It was very difficult listening to what he was saying and, at the same time, waiting to see what may happen to my right hand. I then noticed that my right wrist was getting hotter and hotter and I tried to shake my hand.

'What's the problem?' someone said in front of me. 'Don't move your hand.'

'Please take it off! It's very hot!' I pleaded.

I heard them laughing at me. 'Tell me everything you know about Martin, then I'll take it off,' said the officer.

I felt hopeless. They were forcing me to tell them something I didn't know. 'I'm not telling lies, I met him only once. As I told you, John Htin Aung contacted me through a friend of mine after the army gunned down people in front of Rangoon General Hospital. When I met him he just asked about my student life and the current situation of the students.'

My wrist was now extremely hot. They asked me the same questions again and again and I gave them the same answers.

Finally the officer said, 'Okay, I'll take it off your wrist. But you must sign a document regarding Martin. What do you say?'

I had lost all resistance. I nodded after a few seconds and they took the thing off my wrist. I was then taken back to the stocks. I checked my wrist through the small gap in the blindfold and my skin was flayed and burnt in an area about an inch square. I didn't understand how they had done this to my wrist.

I was then fed and taken to a small room. 'Take your blindfold off after we leave the room,' I was ordered. 'Then read the papers on the table and sign them. We know you want to go home.'

When they left the room I took the blindfold off and checked my wrist. The skin was burnt and blistered. Then I started to read the papers. The document had written that Mr. Martin had asked John Htin Aung to arrange a meeting with me to discuss the student movement. The document said we met and talked for four hours and that Mr. Martin asked me how he could help on behalf of the United States Government. The document stated that before Mr. Martin left he gave me ten thousand kyats and his

telephone number so we could be in regular contact. The last paragraph said that in the second meeting Mr. Martin urged that the students and the NLD youth join forces with the Buddhist monks in Mandalay who had been boycotting the SLORC. It was written that Mr. Martin then gave me a further five thousand kyat, sent me to Mandalay and also provided me with money to distribute anti-government leaflets in town. The MIS had, as usual, written at the bottom of the page that I confessed to all of the above mentioned facts and that no one had threatened or pressured me into signing. I signed the papers, covered my eyes with the blindfold and sat waiting.

A few minutes later someone asked if I signed the papers and two or three soldiers came into the room. I was then taken back to the stocks. After that I wasn't interrogated anymore, but the MIS kept up their psychological torture. They seemed to be very proud of the actions of the SLORC and the current political situation.

One day I was taken from my stocks and put up against a wall. My whole body was then searched.

'Moe Aye, you have to move to another place where there are many people like you,' one of the guards said in an angry voice. 'Tell them that in the era of the SLORC anyone who wants to be involved in politics and revolution will be annihilated. If some day we are defeated, we have already decided to take up arms in the jungle.'

Another guard then said, 'Moe Aye, we never tortured you, did we? If you ever say that we tortured you, you'd better not be around.'

Thirty minutes later, I was sent to Insein Special Prison where I had to stay for the next six years.

## Endnotes

A list kept of the people who live in a house, including the names of any guests who may be staying there. The authorities must be informed of any guests before 9pm each night, and random checks are carried out to ensure households comply.

This question is very rude as the speaker does not use a title before the monk's name to show respect.

A duplicating machine.

## **My Interrogation** **By Ma Tin Tin Maw**

### About the Author

*Ma Tin Tin Maw was born in 1970 in Bassein, southwest of Rangoon. During the 1988 uprising, she was a second year student at Rangoon University and a member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).*

*After the military coup in September 1988, Ma Tin Tin Maw returned to her hometown and served as an ABFSU township organiser. She also joined the NLD's Election Campaign Committee as an ABFSU representative.*

*In July 1990, Ma Tin Tin Maw was arrested by Military Intelligence and spent more than a month in an Interrogation Centre. She was sentenced in September 1990 to three years Centre. She was sentenced in Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act and was released from Bassein prison in September 1992.*

July 1990

It was about ten o'clock at night when officers from the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), Special Branch and the township police arrived at my home, searched the house and confiscated a number of documents. They then arrested me for distributing anti-State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) pamphlets in Bassein, the city in which I was living at the time.

I was sent to a police station near Bassein because there was no room for me in the nearby Interrogation Centre at Military Intelligence Service Unite 4(MI-4). When I arrived at the police station I was that there were more than 20 other students being held there. They took me to the women's cell, and I was forced in after initially refusing to enter. The cell was filthy and full of prostitutes, and the foul smell of the uncovered toilet in the corner filled the small room.

That night I was interrogated for the first time. Officers from police Special Branch asked me questions the whole night and I wasn't allowed any sleep. Most of the questions focussed on whether or not I was responsible for bringing the anti-SLORC pamphlets to Bassein. Captain Tin Myint Htun from MI-4 was present throughout the session. Special Branch stopped the interrogation early the next morning, and two female officers escorted me back to the stinking cell. Just before I was taken back to the cell, Captain Tim Myint Htun threatened me.

'If you refuse to tell the truth here, it won't be easy for you. We can always take you to our Interrogation Centre where we're able to squeeze water from stones.'

My parents found out that I was in custody through a prostitute who had been released. Although my family was able to send me food, the authorities wouldn't permit them to see me. I also had to bribe the police so that I could wash myself in the cell. One day when I was in the cell I looked through the bars and saw a friend of mine in the police station. He was required to report twice a day at the police station because he had been involved in politics. He saw me in the cell and when we said hello to each other, a police officer shouted at me to stop talking. The officer later covered the cell bars with posters so I couldn't see through them into the station.

I spent nearly a week in police custody and while I was there I learnt much about the level of corruption in the police department.

One evening a week after my arrest, I was ordered to gather my possessions. A car from MI-4 had arrived and I was taken from the cell and told to get into the vehicle. There was an officer sitting at the driver's seat and I wasn't sure if he was a captain or a major. The officers ordered me to sit in the back along with two soldiers. After we passed through Bassein, the soldiers handcuffed me and placed a hood over my head and I immediately complained.

'We don't want you to know where we're going,' one of the soldiers replied.

'I know where we're going! I was born here!' I shouted. 'we're going to MI-4.'

'We're just treating you the same as everyone else.'

When the car stopped, two female officers took me into a building and carried out full body search. They also confiscated all my possessions. At that time I heard six tolls from the fire watch, so I knew it was six o'clock in the evening. They then lead

em through the building and we soon stopped and I heard the sound of a door unlocking. After removing my hood, they pushed me into a cell and locked the door.

I looked around the cell which was about nine-foot square. It was cold and the floor was concrete. There was a light bulb hanging from the ceiling and a ceramic chamber pot in one corner. There was also a bed that was just half-a-foot off the floor.

As soon as I lay down on the bed, I heard the door unlock. I suddenly stood up and I saw a soldier standing at the entrance. He told me that I had to move into another cell and as we walked out he ordered me not to look around, pretending that I didn't understand what he had said, he punched me in the head. The soldier then threw me into a dark cell and when he locked the door I couldn't see anything. Nothing else happened that night.

The next morning, a woman came and took me to a bathroom for a wash. I later found out that she was the wife of a soldier. After I washed, I was sent back to my dark cell and at noon a soldier opened the door and threw me a plate of rice and curry along the floor. While I was desperately trying to catch the plate, the soldier quickly shut the door. Hungry and in complete darkness, I ate all the food even though the rice was sour and the curry tasteless.

In the evening of the third day someone opened the door and I was ordered to turn my back to them. They then blindfolded me and dragged to another room. After ten minutes, someone ordered me to sit on a chair and I realised that an interrogation was starting. My interrogator spoke Burmese with a strong accent and I thought that he was probably from one of the many ethnic minority groups, and he asked me the same questions that I had been asked by Special Buanch. He then read out the supposed testimony of one of my friends who was also arrested over the pamphlets and immediately realised that they were attempting to trap me. After the MIS interrogated me for six hours, a soldier took me back to my dark cell.

The next day I had a headache and I was ill from the cold. That evening a soldier came, blindfolded me and took me from my cell. We walked for about 15 minutes and then walked up three steps into a room. I was about to be interrogated by the MIS for a second time. My interrogator, a different man from the first session, read out a list of the members of the Irrawaddy Division All Burma Federation of Student Union (ABFSU) and then started asking me questions.

'Do you admit that you're a member of the ABFSU?'

When I said nothing, he threw something hard at my face. It hit my upper lip which then began to swell.

'Why did you join an illegal organisation?'

'The ABFSU is not an illegal organisation,' I replied. 'I joined the union because I was a student. In 1989, General Khin Nyunt allowed Min Zay Ya to form a student union and...'

'This is Irrawaddy Division under General Myint Aung!' he interrupted. 'You may be able to form a union in Rangoon, but don't even think about it here.'

'There is only one Burma! The same rules should apply to all!' I shouted.

The officer then slapped me a number of times and other officers punched me on my back. I only then realised that there were a number of soldiers around me. After that, he threatened that I shouldn't hear some officers laughing outside and one of them asked me what was happening. I told them I was sick with a fever and asked for a blanket, some medicine and hot water.

'What fever is that? Love sickness?' the officer replied.

I was angry but too weak to respond. At about midnight an officer came and put the hood over my head and pulled me from the cell. He said that I could have everything I wanted if I answer the truth, however I wasn't able to reply because I was too sick from my fever. The officer pulled me along while asking me questions.

'Who did Ko Ko Gyi meet with when he questions.'

Ko Ko Gyi was the Vice-Chairman of the ABFSU. 'I can't remember,' I replied, 'I'm dizzy and I have a high fever.'

He then ordered me to sit on the floor and lean against the wall. I heard him tell someone to bring a cup of coffee and some medicine. After about 15 minutes someone handed me some medicine and a cup of coffee. I asked the officer to take the officer to take off my hood but he refused. While I was drinking the coffee, he continued to ask me questions but I can't remember them, or what I answered.

After taking the medicine, I thought I felt better. Then the officer asked me, 'Do you know what that medicine was you just took?'

Another officer said, 'The medicine you took heightens your sexuality.'

I cried and screamed and tried to remove the hood from my head. The officers then took me back to my pitch-black cell and I remember crying the whole night until I lost my voice.

Over the next few days they didn't ask me any questions, and later I found out that they were busy with newcomers. During this time, I could hear doors being opened and closed near my cell and the sounds of shouting and beatings. Sometimes I would hear someone complaining next door. In my dark, unlit cell, time passed very slowly. All I could do was eat my two meals a day and listen to all the activity around me, and I realised that the newcomers were frequently being pulled in and out of their cells.

After spending nearly a month in the Interrogation Centre, Major Maung Win, the commander of MI-4, came and met with me.

'What do you think of our military coup in September 1988?' he asked me.

'From what I know, all the senior government officers were arrested in the 1962 military coup,' I began. 'But in 1988 the SLORC protected the senior BSPP government officials instead of arresting them.'

He asked me many other questions, but I don't remember them all. Then a soldier led me into a hall and ordered me to sit on a chair. Five minutes later Daw Tin Tin Aye, our township judge, and two other men entered the hall and sat in front of me. They asked me to sign a confession and inquired whether or not I was injured. I showed them my swollen upper lip but they didn't write anything about it on my confession.

The next evening I was sent to Bassein Prison. I was subsequently sentenced to three years imprisonment and was released in September 1992.

## **Like Water in Their Hands** **By Naing Kyaw**

### About the Author

*Naing Kyaw was in his final year at Rangoon University during the political upheaval in 1988. At the time, he was a member of the All Burma Federation of Student Union (ABFSU) and he also became a member of the Democratic Party for New Society (DPNS).*

*He was arrested in 1990 under Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act and was sentenced to three years imprisonment. Following his arrest, Naing Kyaw was interrogated by Military Intelligence officers from Unit 7, based in Rangoon.*

*In 1991, he was transferred from Insein Prison to Thayet Prison, north of Rangoon, and released in 1992. Naing Kyaw participated in the December 1996 student demonstrations in Rangoon, and soon after fled the country. He now lives in exile.*

It was the early hours of March 18, 1990, about three o'clock to be precise. I had just finished reading a book and was ready for bed. However, once in bed I found I couldn't sleep, for I was deep in thought. Then suddenly my thoughts were shattered.

'Bang! Bang! Bang!' Someone was thumping loudly on the front door. I always believed that late night visitors were an ominous sign. I got up and walked to the window, suppressing the urge to shout at them to stop knocking on the door. Peeping out, I saw the familiar face of a local leader of the Law and Order Restoration Council. Behind him were police and soldiers armed to the teeth. I looked around the premises and saw a lot more of them. They had already surrounded the house.

The knocks grew even louder when nobody answered the door. At the same time, the visitors were calling out to see if anyone was in the house. I woke up my friend and whispered to him what was going on. He understood the situation immediately and got up to welcome the intruders.

As soon as the door was opened, about ten soldiers came running into the house. Instantly, soldiers surrounded us pointing their guns in our faces. A plain-clothed officer appeared in front of us and without even uttering a word he started to beat us. Only after he had finished beating us did he ask for our names.

'Squat down!' he ordered us.

We obeyed, and just as I sat down he kicked me in my face. I didn't understand why we were being treated this way. The kicking stopped only when someone intervened.

Now the house was filled with armed personnel. Six of them stood in front of us, their faces determined. The remainder of the group then began to search every corner of the house. I think it lasted more than an hour. Then we were ordered to stand up and a few minutes later, I heard commands being shouted to the soldiers and police to reassemble. By the time we were taken out of the house I was surprised to see the size of the raiding party. There were about 50 of them lining up.

I saw three of the men carrying stacks of documents and photographs out of the house. Then the plain-clothed officer called out to a sergeant, who turned out to be another of the plain-clothed officers. He ordered five soldiers to do something. They brought two black and blue blindfolds that were layers of cloth repeatedly sewn together. The soldiers tied them around our eyes. Then they started spinning us around and I felt dizzy after being spun around a few times. They stopped after we were spun several times. Two men then pulled me towards the waiting vehicle, which I think was a Mazda T-2000 pick-up truck. There were three vehicles including ours.

We got into the truck. As soon as I sat down I felt the barrel of a gun on my temple. 'Don't make a sound,' a voice threatened.

The truck started and drove off, and it sounded like there were two more vehicles behind us. Judging from the noise of the engines, the vehicles must have been military trucks. Stopped and we were ordered to get out. We started walking and I

was often told to bend down to avoid a beam overhead, or to jump over a ditch. Two soldiers still held me tightly by my hand.

Fifteen minutes later, someone kicked me from behind into a room. 'Don't take off the blindfold,' they ordered. Then I heard the door lock which I took as a sign that they had left the room. A while later I heard four or five people talking near my cell and the door clicked open. They didn't waste time. As soon as they entered the room, one of them ordered, 'Stand up and put your hands! Bend your knees!'

There were no more dodgers. I then realised I was being ordered to stand with my hands in the air and my knees bent forward. I must have been in this position for about an hour when I finally fell to the floor from exhaustion. Without saying a word they began to kick me all over my body. I was helpless. I was then told to get up and stand in the same position as before. They eventually stopped the torture only after I dropped to the floor two more times. However, while I had my hands in the air they started asking me questions.

'What's your name?'

'Naing Kyaw.'

'What's your nickname?'

'I don't have one.'

'What about your aliases?'

'I don't have any.'

They went into my personal details, but the questioning was a vicious circle of questions, answers and beatings, for they beat me up at the slightest error or high tone in my voice.

After the questioning the tortures left and I took off the hood. The cell was about six feet by eight feet, and was 12 feet high. The floor, the walls and the ceiling, about eight inches wide with iron bars, but there was no light coming through. The room was illuminated by a light bulb hanging about five feet above the floor. I think it was 100 volts and I later discovered that it was on all the time. The cell also had a table, a chair and a makeshift bed that was about three feet wide and five-and-a-half feet long. I saw some pieces of writing on the walls that looked like poems. My predecessors used cigarette ash, blood and bits of red brick to write with.

After about ten minutes I heard someone knocking on the door. 'Put the blindfold back on,' a voice ordered, and I obeyed.

The door opened and the questioning resumed in the usual manner. Again I had to stand up, put my arms in the air and bend my knees. The questions and beatings, the group left. Some 15 minutes later another group arrived and asked more questions while torturing me in the same style. Since I was still blindfolded, I couldn't exactly tell if there was one group or two different groups of MIS officers.

Before the next round of interrogation I deliberately defied the order to blindfold myself when I heard the knocks on the door. The MIS officers hadn't even entered the cell when they started shouting at me.

'You son of a bitch! Put the blindfold back on!' someone ordered.

I was shocked that they knew exactly what I was doing. I tried to figure out how they knew and much later I learned that there was a one-way mirror in the wall through which my interrogators could see everything I did in the cell. I also realised that there was a narrow corridor about two feet wide outside the room and that it was dark at all times which I think made the mirror invisible from inside the cell. I know

this because on day a few patches of sunlight enabled me to see an armed soldier walking along the corridor, as if he were guarding the cells.

During the next interrogation I was allowed to sit on a chair. After 15 minutes of questioning, a guard handcuffed me of the chair and one of the officers smacked both of my ears.

'Answer my questions correctly,' he then threatened, 'or you'll feel how painful electric shocks are.' After a few more questions, the officer shouted, 'You don't want to co-operate with us and you've give me stupid answers!'

Immediately I felt a cold iron-like object touching my fingers. A moment later I heard the gentle hum of a small motor and an electric wave shot through my whole body. Lthe shock lasted about 30 seconds and my body shook uncontrollably. I felt like my nerves were being stretched and I momentarily fainted.

'How was that?' someone was asking me. 'Was it good? Do your nevers feelrelaxed?' He was doing to me.

'This is called an electri shock,' he said still laughing. 'You'll continue to be treated in this way if we don't get the kind of answers we want from you. You shold know this is the very first step. You'll slowly be given thins that are even more painful,'he added.

The question continued and so did the electric shocks. I remember I was electrocuted four times during this session. Sometimes I didn't hear the questions clearly and I answered them with whatever came to mind. I was also beaten up on occasion for 'not hearing the questions' properly,or I was slapped across the face for 'lying.' Afterwards, I was delirious because of the shocks. I was also very thirsty and hungry. The hunger, thirst and pain mingled through my mind and I couldn't concentrate.

My tortures then took off the handcuffs and left. When I went to sit down on the bed, I fell down unable to prop myself up. I closed my eyes and lay flat. I tried not to think of anything, and in a few minutes I fell asleep.

A series of deafening screams woke me up. I instantly realised that the loud noises were coming from another cell. I heard the sound of beatings and someone in sharp pain accompanied by an angry voice yelling abuse. Once or twice, the painful cries made me feel as if I myself was being brutally tortured. A while later I recognised the voice. It was Ko Bo Kyi, a leader of the lower Burma chapter of the All Burma Federation of Stuedent Unions (ABFSU). His cries of anguish slowly died down after about half an hour.

My mouth was dry and I was dying for some water. I was also hungry and my stomach was rumbling. I also needed to go to the toilet. Feeling thirsty, hungry and in pain, I lay there for another hour until I heard the sound of the latch.

'Cover your face with the blindfold,'a voice ordered .

A group came into the room and stayed for about ten minutes without saying or doing anything. Then they began to talk among themselves and shortly afterwards all of them walked out except the one known as Bo Letwa, or Big Palm. I knew his name from their coversation.

'Take off the blindfold,'he ordered.

I pulled it off and saw the first man in the flesh since my detention. Bo Letwa was a large man. I took him to be about six-foot-three. 'He must be one of the torturers, I was thinking to myself. Then he walked behind me and struck me so hard on my spine that I was thrown off the bed.

'Sit down on the chair,' he ordered.

He then painted my fingers with black ink that he had brought with him. He placed my fingerprints on every page of my answers. There were many pages and I also had to sign at the bottom of each one. When I asked him why I had to do all this, he hit me on the back of my neck. I didn't protest any more and signed all the papers. I also had to sign my name on a blank sheet of paper. I wouldn't get an answer even if I tried to ask what that page was for. The reality was that I was like water in their hands—they could treat me as they liked.

When Bo Letwa left the room, he locked the door behind him. The noises of beatings and cries of pain from adjacent rooms came back to me when I was not occupied with questions or beatings. I remember the facility was filled with the continuous wailing of people suffering excruciating pain. 'This place can kill anyone,' I thought.

A moment later I heard footsteps at the door, and to my surprise I had already pulled the blindfold over my head as soon as I heard the door opening, without being ordered to do so. During this session, my torturers told me to do sit-ups holding my right ear with my left hand as if I were a student being punished by his teacher. They, however, stopped me after a few sit-ups and asked me how many times I thought I could do it.

'About a hundred times,, ' I said confidently.

I was then ordered to do it a thousand times and this frightened me. I think I had finished about 200 sit-ups when I dropped to the floor. That was as much as I could do with the little strength I had left. One of them pulled me up and forced me to stand. They were merciless; I had to go on. It wouldn't take long, only about ten sit-ups, before I would find myself on the floor again. Then they all left without questioning me. Relieved, I slumped onto the bed. Only then did I realise that my feet were swollen from standing while being questioned and the unnecessary exercise.

Just then, I heard a deep groaning sound coming from the cellopposite mine. It was harrowing and made me nervous. About the same the cells around me. The whole place sounded chaotic and I felt lonely for the first time. I knew I was losing my concentration. Then I heard a faint clicking sound in the cell and I began to panic, but I then realised it was just the sound of a small lizard on the ceiling.

Now my throat was almost dry, and even my saliva was drying out, as I had had to swallow it so many times. I was dying for water and food and had an uncontrollable urge to go to toilet. It was strange to feel all this at the same time. For the first time I was hoping someone would open the door. Holding out, it felt like I had to wait ages for the door to open. I began to sweat and feel dizzy and my sight became blurry. Eventually I decided to relieve myself in the cell, as I couldn't stand the pain any longer. I held up my sarong and squatted down to shit. Just as I was about to do it, I heard a loud pounding on the door.

'You must not defecate in the room!' a booming voice ordered.

'Cover your eyes!'

I gathered they were watching me through the mirror. I stood up, rolled down my sarong and put the blindfold back on. I heard a group of people rush into the room.

'What happened?' they queried.

'I want to drink some water, urinate and shit,' I immediately replied.

'Fuck you! We arrested you to interrogate you, not to give you water or food, or send you to the toilet!' someone shouted. 'We can't let you have any of these things until we get satisfactory answers from you! I don't give a shit if you die! Drop dead if you like! But if you shit here in the room, I'll burn your arse with molten iron!'

My hopes for a drink and a shit were shattered. I slumped back onto the floor and screamed out at the top of my lungs. The soldiers left the room chuckling and giggling, and I was left lying on the floor.

Soon after, another batch of soldiers arrived. They asked me what had happened but I didn't say anything. In fact, I had decided not to say a word and to be passive to the abuse. The leader of the group then began to grumble like an old woman when he didn't get any response from me.

'Look at the room. It's dirty and it smells. You're going to die if you stay here a long time. He then pulled me up like a nurse treating an ailing patient. 'My younger brother, we have no authority to give you water or food, but we can send you to the toilet.'

I was then blindfolded, and two of the men helped me out of the room. Once outside, I was told to bend down, jump over a ditch and turn left and right during the ten-minute walk to the toilet. We stopped in front of the toilet and one of them opened the door for me. I had to walk up some steps with them, and once in the toilet I was told to remain where I was. The two men walked back out and closed the door behind them. Then they ordered me to take off the blindfold.

The toilet was the type in which you use water to clean yourself. When I finished going to the toilet, I drank the water from the tap to my heart's content. I then put the blindfold back on and knocked on the door. The two men asked me if I had covered my eyes with the blindfold, I replied that I had and they took me back to my cell. Again I was told to bend down, jump over a ditch and take a few turns on the way back. I think the return trip from the toilet took half the time. In the cell, I was told to sit on the chair and my interrogator began talking.

'Let's have a brotherly chat,' he said. 'You can tell me anything you want and I'll tell you what's on my mind.'

That sounded like a generous offer. He then asked questions about my childhood, my days at school and how I got involved in the events of 1988. He also told me how he became an MIS officer. He asked my opinions regarding the current political situation, the future and the role of youth and students in modern Burma. He wanted to know what I felt about the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

'Let's call a spade a spade,' he said nonchalantly. 'The SLORC has many problems and I don't like a lot of the things they've done. I think they need to come up with some changes. What do you think? Let me hear your views on that.'

I knew what he was driving at. He was working his way around to pump information out of me. I was very careful and figured that he should be revealed. In the course of my answers he would interrupt me to ask questions from time to time. The interrogation session was without any kind of physical torture and with such a favorable atmosphere I took the opportunity to ask for some food.

'I haven't eaten anything for the last two days and I'm very hungry,' I told him. 'Let me have some food.' In fact, in fact, I had no idea how long I had been at the Interrogation Centre. I just guessed.

'No problem. I'll make sure you get some food when we are done with this conversation,' he promised.

Because of his promise, I lost all of what little interest I had in the supposed conversation and looked forward to the end of the session. The session lasted about four hours and before he left I reminded him of his promise. I waited for another half an hour and heard them come back. Out of extreme hunger, I wasted no time to ask for some food.

'You won't get any food, but I'll give you this instead,' the officer said, giving me a strong, heavy blow to the chest.

I was thrown backwards and bumped into someone else who was standing behind me. He pulled me up and kicked my waist. I was thrown forward and I fell face down on the table. I felt blood gushing out from my chin and nose. Then the man behind me pulled me up by my shirt collar and turned me around. This was the perfect position for the officer in front of me as he cuffed my ears with his hands. I was momentarily deafened and could only hear the blurry murmurs of my torturers.

Then they forced me down on my knees with my hands on my neck and my head bowed. They started questioning me in this position. No matter how I answered their questions, I was beaten with a cane and a leather belt and kicked from time to time. They asked one question three times, and other questions that they had asked me two days before. There was nothing I could do. Unfortunately, I was unable to give them satisfactory answers either because I didn't know anything about the situation they were asking, or because I had no connection whatsoever with what they were referring to.

This lasted for about half an hour until one of the officers said to his men, 'We must give him a lesson. He is not co-operating with us.'

A moment later heard the emptying of something like small stones onto the cement floor and I was told to kneel down in the previous position. I knew instantly what was in for me. I had to kneel on tiny, sharp pieces of rock. I didn't have time to protest or try to get up because someone was already holding me down. It was incredibly painful. I couldn't move but I was able to fight back the tears.

For the fourth time they asked me questions for which I had no answers. I realised that if I couldn't give them satisfactory information, or tell them the truth, this could go on for a long time. I wondered if a made-up story could get me out of this situation. I understood this would be a temporary solution. 'This wouldn't work,' I thought to myself. 'If they found out, I could die.' I didn't know what to do.

My thoughts were cut off by a pair of hands that had grabbed my knees and were pressing them down on the stones. I attempted to move but the hands were too strong for me. The next thing I knew, the hands were rubbing my knees into the stones while pressing them down further. I felt the sharp stones piercing my flesh and the agony was unbearable. I didn't cry but tears were rolling down my face from the pain. The hands didn't withdraw and the pain felt like an eternity. I wished I were being beaten instead. In unbelievable pain and unable to move, I screamed at the top of my lungs hoping this would help. But instead they stuffed a rag into my mouth to shut me up.

Afterwards I was allowed to rest and soon I became desperate for food and water. I also wanted to go to toilet. I had heard stories about Interrogation Centres. They

told of such deliberate deprivations of water and food and not allowing you to go to toilet for long periods,

But I never imagined that it would be beyond one's resistance.

An hour later, they came back to the room and I could smell food. I figured that they had brought either fried rice or noodles.

One of them held the plate in front of my nose and said, 'You're very hungry, aren't you? We've brought you some fried noodles because we know you must be getting hungry.'

'Tell me about it,' I told myself.

'But we can only let you have it in exchange for something,' the officer continued. 'That is, you must answer our questions correctly.'

I was convinced that I would not get to eat the noodles.

'Shit, the whole room stinks!' the officer exclaimed. 'You want to go to toilet?' he asked.

I took the opportunity and nodded. As usual I was told to bend down, jump over a ditch and take several turns on the way to the toilet, and it was the same on the way back. When I was brought back to the room, I felt a certain cleanliness. The stench was gone and the screams and beatings from my surrounding cells had died down. The voices I could hear sounded normal. I ate the noodles, but I had suddenly lost my appetite. The officer asked me three questions. I didn't know anything about one question, and the other two I didn't want to answer. I told them whatever was on my mind.

'I can't give you the noodles,' he snapped, 'you'll only get this, and he whacked me over the head. But he didn't stop there. He then lasted because I passed out.'

I came around and couldn't hear any sounds. I removed the blindfold and looked around. I was in another room. It was about the same size as the previous one but the ceiling was much higher. This room had no bed. I saw some pieces of writing on the walls and I began to read them.

Besides a drawing of a man with a stick was written: *You'll regret it if you don't tell them the truth.* Not far from this picture was a poem entitled *The Spirit of Fighting Peacocks*. On another wall someone wrote: *The fourth arrest and my second test*, and underneath was a signature. On the same wall, another piece declared: *Arrested in Mandalay, sent to Rangoon, I don't know if I will find myself in Insein or Kyandaw.* Another piece of writing revealed where I had been. It stated: *Where you are now is MI-7.* Only then did I realise that I had been at Military Intelligence Service Unit 7 headquarters. This was confirmed a few days later when I heard a voice from a loud speaker in the neighbourhood reminding residents of the dangers of fires. The voice announced 'Residents who live in the western part of Prome Road in Rangoon.'

There was more writing on the walls. Someone had written: *Don't worry. It's noble to die fighting for the cause.* I didn't touch them because I dared not eat them without the order from my interrogators. The sound of the door suddenly being unbolted startled me. 'They are here again,' I thought.

'Put the blindfold back on,' a voice ordered. An officer told me to sit in the chair. He sat down in another chair which I presumed he had brought with him. The rest of his team appeared to be standing close by.

'Are you really hungry?' he asked. 'Let's talk and you can have some food when we finish this session.'

The officer then asked me a lot of questions. Sometimes he would threaten me and other times he would just discuss things with me. I had to tell him about myself all over again, my work, my hobbies, how I grew up, everything. He then read out the names of about 200 people and for each name I had to say whether or not I knew them. In the end I happened to know many of them, but I had to lie because they were involved in politics. I was also a bit confused having to identify as many as 200 names at once.

When this was over, the officer asked me a variety of questions about the people he had said I knew. 'How do you know him?' 'Where did you first meet him?' 'Did you work together?' 'Where does he live?' 'What do you think of him?' He then asked me some questions that were entirely unexpected.

'Tell me what you will do when you are released?'

'I'll start up my own business,' I replied.

'Do you want to continue your political activities?'

'Whenever I have the opportunity, I will involve myself in politics for the sake of the country.'

He also asked questions such as, 'What do you think of us in the Military Intelligence service?' 'Where will you go when you get out of here?' 'How many years jail do you think you'll get for what you've done?' and 'Do you think this place can kill you?'

He then asked, 'If I gave you a knife, what would you do? Would you attack me with the knife or would you stab yourself to death?'

I replied, 'I wouldn't stab myself or you.'

'Why?'

'Because I don't want to die.'

'Every human being wants to live,' I replied.

I answered many questions and yet the officer was not content, and he went back to the list of 200 names calling them out once again. Since I had previously lied about who I knew and who I didn't know, I was now worried that I might get caught out. I tried my best, but apparently there were a lot of discrepancies. Surprisingly, I was spared this time and the officer just asked me to tell him a bit more about the people that I said I knew. He asked a few more questions, and to my surprise he went back to the names a third time. Again I had to say whether or not I knew the people.

At last he said, 'I know your answers are not correct but I don't want to treat you badly. You'll see how kind-hearted I am when the next group arrives.'

I guessed I had spoken with this officer not less than six hours. I took off the blindfold when my interrogator and group left the room. The fried noodles were still on the table and although I hadn't been told I could eat, I understood that I had been allowed to have the meal. I reached out for the plate and took a handful of noodles to eat. However, I suddenly smelt something funny. The noodles had gone bad. I put them back onto the plate, wiped my hand with my sarong and slumped back on the bed. I sat there for a long time thinking about many different things.

I was filled with feelings of bitterness, rage, depression and sorrow. Eventually my rage conquered all other feelings and I clenched my fists and punched the cement floor several times. Only when blood started oozing through my fingers did I feel better. I soon fell asleep.

I woke up to the smell of urine and my sarong was soaked. I had urinated in my sleep and I had no idea how long I'd been sleeping. A few minutes later I heard a

loud knock on the door and I put the blindfold back on. Amidst the smell of urine, I smelt some curry. My interrogators had brought me some food, but as usual they began by asking me a few questions.

'You can have this meal after we leave,' I was told. 'But we won't give you any more food if you continue to give us wrong answers.' They then left the room.

There was a cup of bean soup and a cup of water, as well as a mixed fried dish of cabbage and long beans piled up on top of a plate of rice. It was my first meal since I was arrested. After I ate I rested and tried not to think of anything. A few moments later the door opened and a uniformed soldier walked in. He took away the empty plate and cups and left. When he left, I took off the blindfold again and saw that two beetle-nut packs had been placed on the table. I thought that the soldier must have known that I liked beetle-nut.

About an hour later they came back and ordered me to blindfold myself again. As soon as they entered the room they asked me to put my hands up in the air. Without warning someone kicked me in the chest. I thought, amid the pain, that the food I had just eaten might not stay in my stomach.

'You can ride a motorbike, can't you?' he said.

I had to half squat down as if I were riding one. When they were content with my position, they began questioning me. After about half an hour in that position I fell to the floor from pain and exhaustion. I was then forced to get up and squat in the same position. I don't remember how many times over the next three hours of questioning that I fell to the floor in this way. Then I was told to sit on the floor and stretch out my legs. I had no idea what they were going to do to me until I felt something roll down my shins. It was an iron pike. At first the rolls were gentle and didn't hurt, but then they became harder and harder and were agonising. I was unable to resist the pain which was so great that tears began rolling down my face, although I wasn't crying.

I was fed again in the evening. It was fish curry with rice. From that day on, I was given food on regular basis but I still had very little time to rest or sleep. I think it was on the fifth day that I began to run a fever as I had been sleeping on a cement floor without a blanket. When I informed my interrogators about my fever, they said they couldn't give me any medicine and instead began to beat me with their belts.

The following day I found myself lying on the floor, immobile. The fever, brutal torture and unending questioning had led me to this state. I was also beginning to get diarrhoea and had to go to the toilet several times. Finally I couldn't walk any longer and I had to crawl on all fours all the way to and from the toilet. As soon as I got back from the toilet I fell unconscious.

I was already in another room when I came around. A while later, a man showed up and gave me some medicine for diarrhoea and fever. I was given four tablets, two of which were Paracetamol, and he also gave me a cup of water. The following days I was given a Paracetamol after every meal. I also had had a reprieve from the beatings and questions, for they stopped interrogating me for about three days. The interrogations continued when I felt better and I had regained some strength. However, I realised that I was providing answers to their questions that I had previously resisted giving them. This was because I was weak and beginning to feel depressed. It was too late when I realised what I had been doing. It was my subconscious mind that was responding to the questions.

After spending sometime in the Centre, one day during an interrogation I peeped through a gap in the blindfold and saw a file on a table. On the file was written 'Tatmadaw MI-7, which confirmed that I was at MI-7 headquarters.

On another day they kicked, beat and hit me because they said I was lying to them. I then heard someone shouting and cursing outside the room.

'What's all this noise?' came an angry voice.

'We are making him tell us the truth, sir,' my interrogators replied.

'Get rid of him! He's keeping us busy,' the commander ordered.

'We just have to ask him a few more questions, sir,' the officers replied.

'You heard him, didn't you?' they said to me. 'Our commander has ordered us to kill you. But don't you worry. We want to interrogate you for another day. We'll waste you afterwards,' he continued, as if this was just routine for him.

They questioned me for about two more hours and then left. I lay back on the bed, and I was scared. 'Are they really going to kill me? It's not possible. The thought of being killed began to haunt me. I was dazed and my head had become muddled. My body and mind were worn out. I was feeling humiliation, pain and anger. It was the anger I was feeling that made me stand up and punch the walls with my fists. At that moment, I felt I'd gone insane, but I'd also regained my strength.

I remember one day hearing that it was. Armed Forces Day, which had been renamed by the military from Resistance Day, and that the date must therefore be March 27. This meant I'd been in the Interrogation Centre for about ten days. It was either the eve of Armed Forces Day or the Day itself, for I heard soldiers singing songs, making fun of each other and talking about was a hall. They made me stand in the middle and felt someone watching me.

'Major, sir. This is Naing Kyaw,' the guard said.

The major hit me on the back and said, 'Where do you think you will go if we release you now?'

'I'll go home, of course,' I told him.

'Yeah. You'll get back home after about 20 years,' he said sarcastically. 'Send him away,' the major ordered his men.

Two guards held me on both sides and we walked. About ten minutes later, I was told to walk up three steps into a military truck. I had to sit in the front of the truck. I knew I was not alone in the vehicle. I heard people talking quietly and I think there were not less than ten passengers. Many of them seemed to be women.

When the car drove off I heard the women quietly whisper the places we were passing through. 'Myaynigone Traffic Light,' 'Hledan Traffic Light,' 'Thamine Junction,' they would say.

About an hour later we were told to get off the truck and we began to walk. I was told to bend down and jump over something, just as I had been told on my way into MI-7 headquarters. Five minutes later I was told to sit on the ground with my head bowed.

'Take off the blindfold. Don't turn around and look,' the guard ordered me. I took off the blindfold with my head still bowed. 'Close your eyes and keep lowering your head,' the guard continued.

While my eyes were shut he took away the blindfold. About five minutes later, I was told to stand up and open my eyes. The first thing I saw was a big red brick

wall. There was a man in front of me wearing a uniform with the insignia of the Prison Department. I thought he must be a prison official. I looked around and saw several other people in white prison uniforms. Immediately, I realised I had been sent to Insein Prison. Suddenly, I had a feeling of relief and happiness. I couldn't describe the joy I felt at that moment. I had passed through the corridor of death.

Later in prison, I found out that I'd been detained at the MI-7 headquarters for 14 days. When I was released from prison three years later, I concluded that the two weeks of hell at the MI-7 Interrogation Centre was unmistakably much more painful, heart-rending, degrading and longer than my years in Insein.

## Endnotes

The author is referring to Insein Prison and Kyandaw Cemetery in Rangoon. In 1996 Kyandaw Cemetery was bulldozed to make way for a development project.

## **The Storm**

By Ye Teiza

### About the Author

Ye Teiza was born in Lathar township in Rangoon in 1971. He began his political activism as a high school student during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and participated in demonstrations held on Rangoon University campus before the general strike on August 8, 1988. A few days before the general strike he was forced to leave his home because Military Intelligence had come looking for him.

He joined the All Burma Basic Education Students' Union (ABBESU) after the military coup in September 1988. He came to prominence in the ABBESU because of his hard work and commitment, and was subsequently elected to the organisation's Central Executive Committee.

Ye Teiza was arrested in August 1989 and was sentenced to four years imprisonment under Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act. He was sent to Thayawaddy Prison, some 200 kilometres north of Rangoon, where he spent most of his time in solitary confinement.

Ye Teiza was released from Thayawaddy Prison in 1992. He immediately began to contact his colleagues and continued his political activities. However, after

participating in the December 1996 demonstrations in Rangoon, he decided he could no longer remain in Burma. He subsequently left for the Thai-Burma border and is now living in exile in Thailand.

### In Came the Devil

When I was working as a member of the central executive committee of the All Burma Basi Education Students' Union (ABBESU), I mainly dealt with political issues. I also faced many hardships and some days I wouldn't have enough money to buy food and I had to go home and ask for money.

I remember one of those days very clearly. It was the evening of August 26, 1989. I came back from a student union meeting and hadn't eaten dinner so I decided go home and ask for some money. It was about half past ten in the evening when I got home. Fifteen minutes later while I was greeting my mother, I heard three or four men calling out in front of our house.

'Are you going to open the door or will we have to break it down?' they were shouting.

My mother looked extremely concerned. She glanced at me and then opened the door. They kicked the door while my mother was opening it and entered the house without taking off their boots. A sergeant came in followed by three privates who took positions at the back of the house. Then two plain-clothed officers and one army captain came in after them. I saw about ten armed soldiers standing outside the house.

The captain, who had an accent, looked at me and then turned to my mother, 'We are going to take your son with us,' he said. 'we need to ask him some questions.'

'Do you know that your son is involved in forming a student union and spreading propaganda against the government? That's why we are bringing him in to ask him some questions.'

As the captain spoke, the two plain-clothed officers handcuffed me behind my back.

'Don't handcuff me,' I began, 'I'm not a criminal. You can bring me in and ask me questions without doing all this.'

One of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) officers then hit me in my ribs, 'Don't talk so much!'

The other officer put a hood over my head and I heard my mother crying, pleading with them not to beat me. I also heard the captain with the accent push my mother while shouting at her to stay away.

After that I couldn't see anything. The two MIS officers held me by my arms and dragged me out of the house. They put me in an army truck that was parked in front of our house. As soon as I was pushed into the back of the truck, they ordered me to lie on my stomach on the floor and they then started stamping their boots all over my head and body. During that time I heard the captain ordering his men to search the house, and about an hour later I heard the soldiers quickly return. Then I heard the sound of my mother's crying and the truck starting up.

### My Comrades

The officers were kicking and swearing at me all the way to the interrogation centre. When we arrived I was taken from the back of the truck and told to walk with my head lowered with the hood still on. I soon stepped on a concrete floor and I realised

that I was entering a building. At one point they asked me to stop. They then opened a door and kicked me into a room.

'Sit there!' someone ordered.

They slammed the door shut and left. I couldn't breathe properly in the hood and my head and face were bathed in sweat. I was also still handcuffed. A while later, I heard the door open and someone asked me to stand up. I was taken to another room and as soon as we arrived they took the hood off. Because I had had the hood on for a long time, I was momentarily blinded by the strong light in the room and it took me a while to be able to see things properly. When I was able to see properly again, the sorts of things that were going on in the room shocked and distressed me.

There were a number of my colleagues, who were hooded and handcuffed behind their backs, being forced to kneel with their heads bowed. One student was being forced to stand in a position of riding a motorbike and his knees were shaking from exhaustion and pain. All of the students were filthy.

Two MIS officers were interrogating one of the students. 'How did you duplicate and distribute your documents?' one asked.

The student was kicked in his chest. 'I don't know,' he replied as he fell down in front of me.

One of the officers grabbed his neck and took him where the other students were kneeling down. Another officer turned to me and warned, 'You are the last one we need to interrogate. If you don't tell us the truth, you'll get hurt more than the others.'

I was then taken out of the room by the captain who had brought me from my house.

### The Breeze Before the Storm

After they showed me how they tortured my comrades, they took me into a large room where an officer sat. The officer had quite a dark complexion and looked strong.

'Captain Soe Kyi, what did you get as evidence from him?' he asked the captain who accompanied me.

'I got nothing from the house,' the captain replied, 'but it's alright.' He then turned to me and said, 'We have evidence, even though we didn't catch you with it.'

The officer in the room said his name was Captain Tun Aung Kyaw and that he was from Military Intelligence Service Unit 14 (MI-14). I later found out that he was one of the main officers responsible for investigations into the student unions. He started asking me questions as he leafed through the files in front of him. 'Is your student union, the ABBESU, a legal organisation?'

'As long as we students exist the student union will exist, so it is legal.'

'As long as we students exist the student union will exist, so it is legal.' (+)

'We, the government, do not recognise your union.'

'And we do not recognise the SLORC as a legitimate government.'

'You all are young people,' he continued, 'Who taught you to become involved in politics and say these things?'

'No one did. We say things that reflect the present situation.'

'Who is behind all your political activities?' he repeated.

'No one is,' I replied. 'Our political activities reflect our feelings.'

'Do you think you will become a government minister by doing these things?'

'We are not doing this for ourselves. Throughout our history, no student union has ever been involved in politics merely for the sake of winning power.'

Then Captain Tun Aung Kyaw asked me about the activities of our student union and he grew angry when I failed to give him any information. 'We have many

ways to make you tell these things!'he said. 'Our superiors have told us that we can kill you without any problem.'

Captain Tun Aung Kyaw then issued some orders to Captain Soe Kyi who grabbed my neck and took me into another room.

## Gateway to Hell

As soon as we came out from the room Captain Soe Kyi put the hood back over my head, hit me across the face, and told me to keep my head bowed. He then grabbed my hair forcing me to bow my head, and told me to walk. He was not leading me, and to jump over a ditch. Sometimes they even asked me to squat like a frog. They treated me like an animal.

Even when the MIS officers told me to bow and I did so, they would hit me across the head with a stick and say, 'You didn't bow properly!' Sometimes they told me to step across something and I would do it, but they would hit my shins and shout, 'You didn't step across it properly!' They would also ask me to jump and then trip me up, saying 'You didn't jump properly!' After they were satisfied with harassing me, they took me into another room.

When we got there they asked me to squat as though I was riding a motorbike, and three officers began to ask me various questions. I refused to give them any information so they beat me. They beat me when they asked me questions and when I refused to answer them as well. The officers would change shift and would keep asking me the floor many times from the beatings and would keep asking me questions without ever giving me time to rest, even at night. I fell to the floor many times from the beatings and from the pain from sitting in the motorbike position. Whenever I fell down the officers would kick me with their heavy boots and step on my toes and fingers. They would then tell me to stand up again. Whenever I moved, my wrists and my hands felt terrible pain from the handcuffs, which were specially designed to tighten with any movement.

I was interrogated the whole night without being allowed any sleep. My throat had become completely dry and I was extremely thirsty, so I asked for some water. They told me to lie down on a long bench and they removed the hood. They then covered my face with a thin cloth and slowly poured water over my face. The cloth was soon soaked and I started to suffocate. The MIS officer then asked me, 'Have you had enough water? Or would you like some more?'

After they tortured me with the water, they put the hood back over my head and told me to kneel down where they had placed some sharp rocks. While I was kneeling on the rocks, they continued to interrogate me by kicking my ribs and hitting me on my temples. Whenever they hit me the movement of my body tore the skin on my knees which started to bleed over the rocks. I asked them to move the rocks, and they told me to sit down on the floor with my legs stretched out. They continued their questioning and then rolled a stick across one of my shins. It was extremely painful. They pushed and rolled the stick even harder and I was soon covered in sweat from the pain.

When I was in the interrogation centre I was not given enough food or water. When my union colleagues and I were fed together, the MIS guards would lift our hoods to our mouths but wouldn't release our handcuffs. They gave us husky-unrefined rice with rotten dahl soup in the cover of a big cooking pot. My comrades and I had to

bend over and eat the rice by sucking it. Sometimes MIS guards would come in during our meals and kick us, saying we were eating too slowly.

Before they sent my colleagues and into jail, we had to spend a night in one particular room in the interrogation centre. The room was wet, smelt rotten and was full of garbage. They tied all our legs together with one rope that was tied to bars at both ends of the room. With our legs tied together, the rope would tighten if someone moved. As a result no one was able to get any real sleep. To make matters worse, the guards also frequently came into the room that night and shouted at us, 'You bastards! Aren't you asleep yet!'

In the morning we were sent to the police lock-up. Before we left, we were able to see our interrogators, Captain Naing Win and Lieutenant Aung Din. We had only heard their voices while they had been interrogating us over the previous days. Now they took photos of us and asked us to sign some documents, one of them hit me across my head and shouted, 'You don't need to look at that!'

### The Police Lock-up

We were then taken to a police lock-up, and after two days they put a hood on me once again and handcuffed me from the back. They took me to another room and asked me to squat in the motorbike position. Later on, an officer came into the room and asked me questions about the Mandalay Division he got angry and threatened me.

'You will know about me, 'he said. 'I'm tougher than the people you've met before. We could crush you students like sugarcane pulp after it's been crushed for juice!'

They then tied my legs with a rope and turned me upside down. They started kicking my ribs and kept asking me more questions, but I still refused to answer them. They were getting angrier with me, so they untied me and told me to sit in a chair. After that they placed a ballpoint pen, with angled sides, through my fingers so some fingers were on top and others were underneath. They then squeezed my fingers. The pain was so agonising that my whole body shook.

When that was over, the officers reached for the electric bulb that was on in the room and lowered it on top of my head. The light was excruciatingly hot and my head began to heat up and I felt dizzy. They did these things for the whole night and sent me back to the lock-up in the morning. I couldn't see anything when I got back to the lock-up. My head was spinning and my fingers were swollen.

We were not allowed to see our parents while we were in the would see the marks and bruises on our bodies and discover that we were being tortured.

From the police lock-up we were taken to Insein Special Prison. I was later transferred to Thayawaddy Prison where I was detained for three years, mostly in solitary confinement.

### The Last Days of Mr. Leo Nichols

By Moe Aye

### **Brief Biography of Mr. Nichols**

James Leander Nichols was born in Australia in 1931. A long-time resident of Burma, he operated a shipping company from 1945 until 1962, the year when private firms were nationalised, and was the godfather and close friend of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Leo Nichols was appointed the Norwegian Honorary Consul to Burma in 1969, and in 1978 he was appointed consul for Denmark. In 1993, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) withdrew permission for him to serve as a consul, and he subsequently continued to act as a de facto honorary consul for Norway, Denmark, Finland and Switzerland.

He was arrested on April 5, 1996 and charged with operating a fax machine and phone lines without official permission. It is widely understood he was arrested for his close association with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. On May 20, 1996, he was sentenced to three years jail and fined US\$5,000. A month later on June 22 he died in prison while waiting for an appeal.

The SLORC initially claimed Mr. Nichols died of a stroke in Rangoon General Hospital, while Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw later said he died from eating food 'he should not have taken.' Leo Nichols was hastily buried in a cemetery in Rangoon the day after his death. No autopsy was conducted and due to the haste of the burial none of his family were able to be present at the funeral.

Leo Nichols is survived by his wife, Felicity Nichols, and five children.

It was in May 1996 when I saw Mr. Nichols in Insein Prison. I was serving my final year of a seven year prison sentence, and the Burmese military junta was campaigning hard to attract foreign visitors to the country. They had christened it 'Visit Myanmar Year.' Even so, I remember that the military leaders imprisoned many foreigners that year. Most of these foreigners were from China, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan and the majority had come to Burma for Business reasons. There were also more than 400 Thai fishermen who were arrested, but they are frequently detained.

Among the many imprisoned foreigners I encountered, I can recall two with Burmese connections. One of them was Dr. Shum, also known as Yunuk and Saw Yan Naing, who was a Burmese with Malaysian citizenship. He was a businessman, an artist and a Burmese. All that I knew then was that he was the honorary consul general to Denmark and was said to be very close to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Dr. Shum and Mr. Nichols were sent to Insein Special Prison where political prisoners are held. It was a well-known fact in Insein at the time that the Burmese military regime held a grudge against these two, more so than any other prisoners in Insein.

In an evening in May 1996, when I was outside emptying the chamber pot with other prisoners, we saw a man in a yellow sports chamber pot with other prisoners, we saw a man in a yellow sports shirt and a white prison sarong. He was sitting in the back of a truck among rice pots and a blue hood was pulled over his head. The truck was used to carry rice and curry pots from the main Insein Jail to our Special Jail. 'A new prisoner,' I thought to myself.

Out of sheer curiosity, we hung around for a while to see if we could find out who the new prisoner was. I thought he could be someone I knew, a fellow student perhaps. We saw a warder lead him down from the truck before the rice pots were unloaded. He was then taken into the main jail office. He was tall and white, and was handcuffed behind his back.

Soon after, two warders took him towards the cells of Hall-1 where we were housed. By that time the handcuffs had been taken off and the hood removed. The man didn't look Burmese but resembled a white foreigner. He was wearing spectacles

and appeared uncomfortable in his prison sarong, which was designed for Burmese prisoners. The sarong barely covered his knees. We saw him untying and retying the sarong while he was walking along as if it was not properly fastened.

When he arrived at his cell we noticed he had a large forehead and thin hair. It was clear that he was both shocked and frightened.

We wanted to say hello to him but the two accompanying warders warned us not to. 'Don't speak to him now,' they said. 'The MIS captain is still in the main jail office. 'Because the warders were friendly with us we followed their advice and instead smiled at the new foreign prisoner. Blank and perplexed, he looked back at us but didn't say a word. Shortly afterwards, we saw warders drag him into Cell-5. However, to our luck the next cell housed an elected representative of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Who knew the foreign prisoner. Soon they were speaking in English, a language the warders didn't understand.

Within half an hour, we came to know that his name was Mr. Leo Nichols and that he had just been sentenced to three years imprisonment for helping Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. He was suffering from dysentery and we were soon busy looking for medicines for him. He said he could not eat the prison food, so we collected biscuits and other dry snacks for him from fellow political prisoners. We sent the food to him through a friendly warder and hoped that it might satisfy his hunger for a while.

Mr. Nichols was unlucky. We were between family prison visits and the supplies we had secretly stockpiled were almost gone. We were therefore unable to give him better food. Later we were informed that the NLD parliamentarian explained to Mr. Nichols in English about the rights of political prisoners and of foreign prisoners. He advised Mr. Nichols to talk to the prison authorities to demand his rights. The Member of Parliament also explained to him that the jail hall where he was being housed was for political prisoners and that he should not be disheartened. As soon as Mr. Nichols heard that he was surrounded by political prisoners, he said 'Hello'to everyone in English.

The same night he was thrown into prison, MIS officers came and took Mr. Nichols away for further questioning. He was taken after the warders called lights-out. They took him to the Interrogation Cell in the prison. As usual, a hood was pulled over his head. Mr. Nichols had to spend the whole night in the Interrogation Cell while being questioned and abused. We saw warders bring him back to his cell the following evening.

We cheered him up whenever we had the chance to get out of our cells and walk by his cell. Those who could speak English spoke to him as soon as the warder disappeared, and asked him various questions.

I recall some of the things he told us. He said he was detained for helping Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and that he had sent faxes for her. As a result he said he was given three years imprisonment with hard labour. The court that sentenced him conducted a summary trial. He couldn't tell us the name of the court, but he tried to explain to us that it was a special court.

Before he was sentenced he was taken to an MIS Interrogation Centre and questioned for six consecutive days. He said when the MIS came to arrest him they confiscated all his money, which was more than two million kyat. The money had come from the recent sale of some land in Maymyo. We didn't know whether it was his own land or if it belonged to someone else. He told us that he was arrested the day after the land sale.

He wasn't able to tell us exactly where he was sent after his sentencing and before his transfer to our cells. But he did say that he was taken to a hall where there were many prisoners, and that he had to stay there for a few days. He was then transferred to a tiny room and had to stay there a few more days until he was taken to our hall.

The prison authorities confiscated his watch and other clothes upon his arrival at Insein. The pair of trousers he was wearing was taken away because the prison

officials said that he could not wear trousers in prison. Instead, he was issued a white prison sarong and a white shirt. He said that a prisoner gave him the yellow sports shirt he was now wearing.

We asked him whether he was beaten or forced to sit in a *pounsan'* position upon his arrival. He said he had to sit in this position for a long time although he was not beaten. When he was telling us this, we sensed a feeling of distress in his voice. Judging by what he had said, we concluded that prior to his sentencing he was detained in the section of Insein where prisoners are held before they are taken to court. On the day he was given three years imprisonment, we believe that he was probably transferred either to Hall-6, which was known as the punishment hall, taken to a 'dog kennel' cell or held in one of the detached cells within the interrogation hall. We also concluded that by forcing Mr. Nichols to sit in the *Poun-san* position for long periods, the military junta had shown their extreme hatred of him.

This reminded us of U Win Tin Moe, the two most well known political prisoners in Insein at the time. The junta had made U Win Tin, an NLD Central Executive Committee member, stay in cell with well-known criminals, notorious for their bullying, extortion and physical abuse. As for Saya U Tin Moe, who is widely known for his fiery poems, he was forced to go through Hall-5, the *poun-san* hall, upon arrival. Later he was forced to share a cell with criminals in the same hall. However, both of them were allowed to keep a shirt and a sarong which they each brought from their homes. In the case of Mr. Nichols, he was not even allowed to keep any of his belongings. We therefore all thought that Mr. Nichols was probably the most hated prisoner of the regime.

Mr. Nichols also had diabetes and that made his condition all the worse. As a sufferer of this disease, he was required to be very careful with what he ate. In addition, he needed regular exercise. However, he wasn't given proper food and he was never able to take regular exercise which he needed to alleviate his suffering.

Mr. Nichols told us that he had to stand up for hours during his interrogations and was not allowed to either sit down or walk around in order to diminish his stiffness and pain. According to the friendly warder, the MIS officers and Mr. Nichols exchanged angry words in English during one of the interrogation sessions. He told us that he overheard some MIS officers discussing how to break down Mr. Nichols' morale and said they were talking about the best ways to give him a 'lesson' and 'psychological torture.' We also learned about the ruthless determination of his interrogators. Another warder, who got on well with us, said that MIS Major Soe Nyunt ordered his men to carry out their duties regardless of the consequences after he had read Mr. Nichols' interrogation report. The major said, 'Be tough on him no matter who he is. I'll take full responsibility if anything happens.'

Mr. Nichols confided in us that he was very afraid of the night when he was taken away for questioning. Trembling and pitiful, he recounted what happened during the interrogation sessions. He said he was interrogated countless times before being sent to Insein, and yet it was far from over. 'They have continued to question me even now, and I don't know if I can go through this any longer,' he said. 'I can't take this anymore.'

He said he told the MIS everything he did for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi but they had continued to question him repeatedly in the mistaken belief that Mr. Nichols had helped her more than what he had revealed to them.

We suggested to Mr. Nichols that he appeal to Chief Warden U San Ya, who was in-charge of the Special Prison, and to his deputy U Min Wei regarding his declining health. However U San Ya simply told Mr. Nichols that he had no authority to provide any medicine for his dysentery, diabetes and hypertension without the permission of the MIS. He told Mr. Nichols, 'I am afraid the prison cannot arrange any food that is suitable for your diabetes.'

A while later U San Ya warned us, 'You must not give any medicine, food or clothes to Mr. Nichols.' He said that if the MIS conducted a surprise search and found

anything more than what he now had in his cell, all the Special Prison officials would not only lose their jobs but would also stand trial. 'And you prisoners who have provided food and medicine will be severely punished,' he added.

Another problem that added to Mr. Nichols' misery was defecating. The chamber pot was difficult enough to use, but he also had nothing with which to clean himself afterwards. It was alright for Burmese political prisoners because during our first few days and weeks in prison we used cigar butts to clean ourselves and broken bits from our bamboo sleeping mats. It was, however, a great discomfort and embarrassment for Mr. Nichols.

We gave him bits of clothing torn from old prison uniforms and told him to soak them in the water from the drinking water pot to told him to soak them in the water from the drinking water pot to clean himself. One of the prisoners exchanged his new prison sarong with the old one that Mr. Nichols was wearing, and another prisoner temporarily changed his shirt with Mr. Nichols' yellow sports shirt so that he could wash it for him.

We hid a small piece of soap in one corner of the water enclosure for him. By various means we persuaded the warder, whose duty was to keep an eye on Mr. Nichols, to turn a blind eye while he was bathing. Because of that Mr. Nichols was able to spend a little more time having his bath. We also provided him with towels. We pleaded with the warder not to report these activities to the prison officials, and we succeeded because we didn't hear any complaints from the officials regarding Mr. Nichols. In return, Mr. Nichols would repeatedly thank all the political prisoners who walked past his cell. We took his expression of gratitude as recognition of our help.

While he was in Insein, Mr. Nichols was particularly interested in four political prisoners whom he felt extremely sympathetic towards. They were the Venerable Saya Daw U Nyana, a monk who was forcibly disrobed and sentenced to ten years imprisonment; the youngest political prisoner Han Win Aung who was only 20 years old at the time of his imprisonment; Kyaw se Lin (a.k.a. Pyaung Lay) who had been in prison for the second time; and Thein Htun Oo (a.k.a. Kyeat Oo). When Mr. Nichols heard that Han Win Aung, Kyaw Soe Lin and Thein Htun Oo had each been given seven years for their political work, he repeatedly cried out 'Oh, my God!'. He was deeply concerned at their heavy prison terms and was so sympathetic and upset that he wanted to find out more about them whenever the opportunity availed itself.

Mr. Nichols promised everyone that when he got out of prison he would tell the world about the suffering of political prisoners in Burma. He was never able to fulfil his promise.

One day we saw him taken away by MIS officers in a truck carrying empty rice pots. As usual, there was a hood over his head. When he failed to return after a few days we began to get very worried. Four days later he finally showed up with the MIS officers. We noticed that his legs were swollen and his face was all puffed up. As soon as the MIS officers left, he told us that he was forced to stand for many hours on end while being questioned, and that he was not allowed to rest. He repeatedly said that he didn't understand why he was being treated this way even after they had sent him to prison. The MIS had repeatedly asked for his opinions on the possible actions of the European Union regarding Burma. They also asked questions concerning Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's personal life.

We spoke to warden U Tin Win, who was in-charge of medical care at the Special Prison, and requested that he provide the necessary care for Mr. Nichols. He explained to us that he couldn't do anything because the MIS was handling Mr. Nichols' case. He asked us to understand the situation. But he advised us to give Mr. Nichols at least four tablets of algae medicine everyday. This had to be done secretly. With this advice, we approached a warder to buy us a bottle of algae tablets and we planned to give Mr. Nichols this medicine twice a day. But he never had the chance to take our medicine.

A few days after his return, the MIS took Mr. Nichols away again with a hood over his head. That was the last time we saw him.

In the short time that he lived in Cell-5 of the Special Prison, he was never able to spend twenty-four hours straight in his cell. He was routinely questioned and transferred from one hall to another. When he was taken out of his cell for the last time, he was suffering from acute dysentery, vomiting and dizziness. His legs were visibly swollen and he couldn't walk properly.

Before he was taken away for the last time, Mr. Nichols said a few farewell words to his cell neighbours as if he was going away for good. He said to the NLD representative, 'I'll lie down on the floor if they force me to stand and answer questions this time. I can't take this any more....I think I'll be lucky if I make it back here one more time. If I don't make it back, please tell everyone here for me that I owe them for their kind help.'

About a week later we heard the tragic news that Mr. Nichols had died. All that we were told was that he was forced to choose the path in which there was no way back.

Endontes

The poun-san sitting position is used by the authorities for inspection of prisoners, counting prisoner numbers or for punishment. The prisoner must sit cross-legged on the floor with his hands on his knees, back straight and head bowed.

The poun-san hall is where new prisoners are taken in order to teach them the rules of the prison. It is also used for punishment.

### **Other ABSDF Publications**

**To stand and Be Counted: The Suppression of Burma's Members of Parliament**

A detailed examination of the fate of Burma's Members of Parliament elected in 1990. (June 1998, 352 pages)

**Terror in the South: Militarisation, Economics and Human Rights in Southern Burma**

A report on the link between the military, business ventures and human rights abuses in southern Burma (Nov. 1997, 50 pages)

**Letters to a Dictator**

A collection of letters from the NLD to the SLORC detailing repression of party members. (July 1997, 186 pages)

**Forced Relocation and Human Right Abuses in Karenni State**

This report focuses on the massive forced relocation of people in Karenni (Kayah) State. (May 1997, 34 pages)

**Burma and the Role of Women**

This book outlines the history of women's contribution to the pro-democracy movement. (March 1997, 78 pages. Second edition by ALTSEAN-Burma.)

**Pleading Not Guilty in Insein**

The translation of an official SLORC court document of the trial of 22 political prisoners. (Feb. 1997, 82 pages)

**Cries From Insein**

Written by former political prisoner Win Naing Oo, this book gives a detailed account of Insein Prison. (Feb. 1996, 84 pages)