

Spirit for Survival

Publishing & Distribution
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners(Burma)
(AAPP)

September 2001

Copy
1000

Lay out design by
IPO Art group

cover design by
Maung Tauk

Address
AAPP
P.O Box 93
Mae Sot, 63110
Tak Province
THAILAND

Email: aapp@cscoms.com
Tel/fax 66-1-28 78 751

CONTENTS

3	Acknowledgements	38	BEHIND THE IRON DOOR Ko Myo (AAPP)
6	Introduction	44	A STAR FALLS DOWN BEFORE SUNRISE (Naing Kyaw)
8	What is AAPP?	51	EXILE FROM RANGOON BURMESE ACADEMIC (Doug Blackburn Staff Writer)
10	TOUCH (Poem) (Hugh Lewin)	56	10-D (Kyaw Zwa Moe)
12	MISRULE OF LAW (Aung San Suu Kyi)	62	TAKING EXAMS IN PRISON Sai Win Kyaw (AAPP)
16	WHAT IS TORTURE? (Bo Kyi)		
22	THE UNKNOWN STORY OF THE TWENTY-FOUR (Zin Linn)		



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.

What is AAPP

Since the 1988 popular democracy movement was crushed in a ruthless crackdown by the military regime, thousands of people have been arrested, tortured and given long prison sentences for their beliefs and political activities.

Moreover, even after political prisoners are released, they continue to face horrible treatment. The military uses all available means to intimidate and harass ex-political prisoners in order to prevent them from conducting political activities. When extraordinarily sensitive occasions take place in the country-such as the anniversary of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising-ex-political prisoners are usually re-arrested, interrogated and detained for an unlimited amount of time without reason. The military regime also uses many different tactics to attempt to isolate ex-political prisoners from society. The main weapon of the junta to marginalize ex-political prisoners is to deny them economic and educational opportunities.

For these reasons, many ex-political prisoners are forced to live in exile. Many ex-political prisoners who previously gave assistance to their fellow political prisoners wanted to continue these activities. In order to be effective and efficient in performing these activities, and to honor student leader Min Ko Naing who has been held under detention by the military regime since March 23,1989, former political prisoners established AAPP on the 11th anniversary of Min Ko Naing's arrest.

What we do:

- (1) Assist families of political prisoners to visit their loved ones.
- (2) Support prisoners by providing necessities such as food and medicine.
- (3) Monitor conditions in prisons.
- (4) Publicize arrests, conditions and life stories of imprisoned political activists and artists.
- (5) Advocate in accordance with international bodies, provide information to Amnesty International, International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch and so on.
- (6) Assist former political prisoners with their mental and physical rehabilitation from torture and isolation.

Objectives:

1. To report on the military regime's oppression of political prisoners who are presently detained in various prisons.
2. To encourage the support of international governments and organizations in order to pressure the Burmese military regime to prevent the further persecution of political prisoners.



TOUCH

When I get out
I'm going to ask someone
to touch me
very gently please
and slowly,
touch me
I want
to learn again
how life feels.

I've not been touched
for seven years
for seven years
I've been untouched
out of touch
and I've learnt
to know now
the meaning of
untouchable.

About the Author

Aung San Suu Kyi is a daughter of the Burma independence architect General Aung San and a Burma's pro-democracy leader. She educated in Burma, India and England. She obtained a B.A (Hons) in philosophy, political and economics from Oxford University in 1967. Worked at United Nations headquarters in New York and in 1972 she married Dr. Michael Aris, an Oxford academic and expert on Tibetan culture and the Himalayan region.

In April 1988, she returned to Burma to look after her ailing mother. After the coup in 1988 she founded the National League for Democracy together with former Chief of Staff U Tin Oo. She won *Nobel Peace Prize in 1991*. She wrote many academic works and the book *Freedom from Fear* is the most popular among the world-wide audience. She is now being held under house arrest in her lakeside house in Rangoon.



When U Win Htein asked those who had come to take him away whether they had an arrest warrant, they replied that it was not necessary as charges had already been moved against him and his sentence had been decided.

Many of them are already seasoned jail veterans who, at casual moments, exchange prison yarns and instruct the as yet uninitiated on such matters as the kind of treatment they can expect at the interrogation sessions and what they should take with them when the banging on the door comes: change of clothing, soap, toothpaste and toothbrush, medicines, a blanket or two, etcetera, all in a plastic bag. Nothing so respectable as a knapsack or suitcase is permitted. And do not be fooled if the people who turn up at the door, usually without a warrant, say that they will only be keeping you for a few days. That could well translate into a 20-year sentence.

When U Win Htein, a key member of my office staff, was arrested one night last May, he had a bag already packed. He had previously spent six years in Insein Jail: He was one of the people taken away from my house in 1989 on the day I

was detained and he was released only in February 1995. When U Win Htein asked those who had come to take him away whether they had an arrest warrant, they replied that it was not necessary as charges had already been moved against him and his sentence had been decided. So much for the concept of the law that deems a person innocent until proven guilty. Section 340 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that "any person accused of an offense before a criminal court, or against who proceedings are instituted under this code, in any such court, may of right be defended by a pleader." This basic right to counsel is systematically denied to political prisoners in Burma. They are not even allowed to make contact with their families.

The authorities generally refuse to give any information on detainees who have not yet been tried. The NLD and the families of political

About the author

Bo Kyi became involved in politics during the 1988 popular uprising in Burma. He is a former executive committee member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU). He was arrested together with Min Ko Naing, chairperson of the ABFSU, on March 23, 1989, but was later released.

On March 16, 1990, he was arrested again for taking part in a demonstration demanding the release of all student prisoners, and was sentenced to three years with hard labour. He was released from prison in 1993 but was detained again on July 17, 1994 and sentenced to five years imprisonment with hard labor. He was released on October 2, 1998 from Tharawaddy prison and he left Burma a year after his release.

He is a joint secretary of Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP) and lives in Thailand.

The Tokyo declaration on torture provides a basic definition of torture.

Concerning the aims of torture, however, it mentions only the immediate reasons for inflicting torture and not the underlying purpose, which is to effectively destroy the soul of a human being.

The process begins with arrest, usually at night. In Burma, however, sometimes this process starts in broad day light in public places. This was the case with the arrest of Min Ko Naing, one of the most prominent student leaders of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Min Ko Naing, now 38 years old, is the chairman of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU). He and I were arrested in front of many people by a group of men in civilian clothes on the afternoon of March 23, 1989. Our arrest was violent—three policemen pulled our necks very roughly, as if we were dangerous criminals. Then we were turned over to agents of the Military Intelligence services



(MI). The MI men put handcuffs on Min Ko Naing and pulled a dirty hood over his head before taking him away in a truck. I and several other people witnessed the vicious beating he received as he was being dragged away to the truck. The MI agents kicked and punched him all over his body, then took him away to a secret destination where he was kept for several weeks and brutally tortured. His family was not permitted to visit him for nearly three years.

They saw at once that he was suffering from physical and psychological trauma. Now, 11 years after his arrest, Min Ko Naing still languishes in Sittwe prison, far from his family in Rangoon.

In Burma, under the present

Spirit for Survival

Torture is designed to break down the identity of a strong man or woman, turning a union leader, a politician, a student leader, a journalist, or a leader of an ethnic minority group into a non-entity with no connection on to the world outside of their torture chamber

of torture are very severe, but the worst form of torture is psychological. Mostly, psychological torture starts upon arrest. As soon as one is arrested, a dirty hood is placed over the head. One immediately loses all contact with the outside world. Then one is put into isolation in a small cell, which is kept either very dark or very bright. While under interrogation, one is not allowed to sleep, eat or drink for at least 36 hours. The victim loses all sense of time. Torture victims are not allowed to bathe for many days and are kept in very unsanitary conditions. When the detainee requests a visit to the toilet, the authorities turn a deaf ear.

Under such circumstances, the torture victim may become abnormal, sometimes resulting in suicide. Tin Tin Nyo, 26, a well-known female student leader, was detained and interrogated by MI in 1990. While she was in the interrogation center, she was kicked in her supra pubic region by MI agents wearing jungle boots. Further details of her torture are not known, because she refused to dis-

cuss them with anyone. Finally, on December 31, 1993, she succeeded in killing herself.

Physical and psychological forms of torture are often closely linked, leaving scars that are difficult to detect. Many victims will not dare to reveal their experiences of having their sexual organs violated as it is closely linked to shame and guilt and the fear of a social stigma when they are released.

Many victims suffer from insomnia and nightmares long after experiencing torture. Severe depression is another common problem, often so debilitating that it becomes extremely difficult for the victim to return to normal life.

Public awareness can help prevent the future torture of unfortunate victims, as well as the nearly 2,500 political prisoners still inside Burmese prisons. Let's think how we can help the torture victims.

Bo Kyi

From

Irrawaddy Vol.8 No.3, March 2000

About the Author

Zin Linn was born on February 9, 1947 in Mandalay Division. He began writing poems in 1960 and received a B.A (Philosophy) in 1976

He became an activist in the High School Union after the students' massacre on 7th July 1962. He then took on a role as an executive member in the Rangoon Division Students' Union. He participated in a poster-and-pamphlet campaign on the 4th anniversary of 7 July movement and went into hiding to avoid the military police. He was still able to carry out underground pamphlet campaigns against the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). However, in 1982, he fell into the hands of MI and served two years imprisonment in the notorious Insein Jail.

In 1988 he took part, together with his old students' union members, in the People's Democracy Uprising. In November of that year, he became an NLD Executive Committee Member for the Thingangyun township and later became an NLD Rangoon Division Organizing Committee member.

In 1991, he was arrested because of his connections with the exiled government, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), and the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment in the notorious Insein Prison. In December 1997 he was released. He was given an honorary certificate by Aung San Suu Kyi for his commitment to the struggle for democracy.

Zin Linn was an editor and columnist and contributed over three hundred articles to various publications, especially on international affairs, while inside Burma.

He fled Burma in 2000 and currently works for the NCGUB while also assisting AAPP and writing regular articles.

Education is the most powerful guardian of a civilization. It is the sole vehicle by which priceless treasures of former generations are carried to the present. It is the mighty force that propels the knowledge of human beings into the IT age and beyond.

All leading cells of society know this very well. Therefore many far-sighted nations have decided to invest heavily in education to protect their bright futures. But some foolish regimes intentionally crack down on educational institutions. They also suppress the students and people who thirst for knowledge.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (S.L.O.R.C) or State Peace and Development Council (S.P.D.C) of Burmar is a regime of this kind. Under the regime most of the colleges and universities have been sent to the outskirts of cities. The thoughtless junta even recognizes students and people as their enemies or destructive elements.

They inherited this concept from their godfather, the notorious Gen. Ne Win, who declared war on students after the July 7 massacre in 1962. From that day on, students have been under severe suppression and, in some cases, have not been allowed to further their studies.

The junta has systematically ruined the education system, blocking every progressive book and periodical from appearing in Burma. They pay particular attention to any material published in the West. That is why a series of student uprisings have broken out from time to time in Burma. That is also why prisons in Burma are crowded with prisoners of conscience.

Under British colonial rule, prisoners were allowed to read and write while in custody. However, the Myanmar military dictators strictly prohibit this practice in their prisons. They don't even allow a scrap of packing-paper to exist within the cell confines. If a piece of paper is found in the hand of a prisoner he is made to wear iron-shackles and is put into solitary confinement for 3 months.

But we, the political prisoners of Insein Prison, were just like people who lost their way in the desert and were thirsting for water. We thirsted for knowledge, as well as outside news, in that desert-like prison. At last, we made up our minds to take the risk of quenching our thirst.

It was in the middle of December 1992. We, the political prisoners of Insein Jail, had heard that a so-called 'National Convention'

to keep up to date on outside political developments.

For this reason, members from NLD, DPNS, ABSDF, ABFSU, KNU, CPB and individual politicians exchanged opinions and agreed to cooperate for the common cause. The result appeared as a Joint-Action Committee (JAC).

Under the JAC there were 5 sub-committees:

- (1) The Committee to Protect Political Prisoners' Rights (CPPPR)
- (2) The Committee for Convening Political Ceremonies (CCPC)
- (3) The Media & Information Committee (MIC)
- (4) The Hand-written Periodicals Producing Committee (HPPC)
- (5) The Medical Assistance Committee (MAC).

The MIC cooperated with the HPPC in delivering periodicals throughout the cell-compound. The two committees smuggled journals, magazines, papers and writing materials into the prison. Eventually, the MIC also succeeded in getting two 8-band pocket size radios. The two committees then cooperated in collecting news from the radio and managed to produce a weekly news bulletin. In this way we got updates from Time & Newsweek as well as Burmese newspapers and periodicals. Then we could exchange our political outlooks through hand-written magazines, such as *The Tidal Wave*, *The New Blood Wave* and other annual issues. Moreover the MIC and HPPC took on the task of submitting a report on human rights abuses in prisons to the UN. So, they collected radio-news and recorded firsthand accounts of other prisoners, as well as from the wardens.

Every weekend, the jail authorities assigned the prisoners who were not given a sentence by a law-court to forced labor in prison. Some of them were sent to our cell-compound to do cleaning works. As the JAC had directed us, we tried to gather fresh outside news from these prisoners. Sometimes we came across NLD members. Then we persuaded the warden in charge of our cell-compound to give us an opportunity to chat with these people. In this way we often received important, up-to-date news on the political situation.

Thus, all of us were able to participate in a concerted effort to raise

syringes into the prison cells. Dr Zaw Myint Maung and Dr Myint Naing took responsibility for administering medical treatment and were successful in treating minor surgical cases.



The most important accomplishment was achieved with all 5 committees cooperating to collect data on human rights abuses in the junta's prisons. After collecting the information, a report was finally finished by the famous Hantharwaddy U Win Tin, former editor of the Hantharwaddy Newspaper. It was then sent to Mr. Yozo Yokota, the UN Special Rapporteur for Burma, on July 15, 1995.

The report was a great blow to the junta. So, with severe anger, the prison-authorities and MI commenced a vigorous investigation to uncover those who took leadership roles in smuggling out the human rights report. They eventually got the upper hand with the help of a traitor and ex-sergeant, Tin Win from Thongwa Township. The whole network then fell into the hands of the MI in November 1995.

After 6 months of investigation, using severe methods of torture, 24 out of 37 inmates were accused of taking part. A so-called 'court' summarily sentenced the 24 political prisoners to further imprisonment on 28 March 1996.

All of these 24 prisoners of conscience actively cooperated to show their democratic-spirit. They especially fought for the right of freedom of expression. The junta has taken harsh action upon all of them but it can't destroy their journalistic heart and soul. People throughout the country have heard their story and show their sympathy, recognizing their courage and determination as a marvelous defiance of the infamous junta. These men accomplished a great victory under the most inhumane military dictators. .

The 24 prisoners of conscience deserve a genuine honor. The valiant 24 achieved the unthinkable for a genuine democratic cause and freedom of expression in the most notorious of Burmese prisons. Their names deserve to be inscribed in an historical record book as an example to others.

The world today is actively calling for Globalization and moving

has tried to change his ideology he stands firmly on the side of democracy.

He received UNESCO's Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Award in 2001.

Dr Zaw Myint Maung



Dr Zaw Myint Maung, 48, won a seat in Parliament in the 1990 Election for the NLD. He is the MP for Amarapura Township in Mandalay division. He was arrested for participating in the forming of a provisional government and was sentenced to serve 25 years imprisonment in November 1990.

Dr Zaw Myint Maung was a leading activist in the prison movement and was a brave and active member of Insein Prison's CPPPR as well as the MIC. He is a qualified writer and poet. He is also a very reliable physician and was a member of the MAC in our cell-compound. His work in both fields resulted in two separate sentences: 7 years for code 5(J) and 5 years for panel code 6. His total additional sentence was 12 years.

He is now in the Myitkyina Prison.

Dr Myint Naing



Dr Myint Naing, 49, is an elected member of parliament from the 1990 election. His constituency is the Kantbalu Township, which lies in the Sagaing division. He was arrested in November 1990 together with Dr Zaw Myint Maung for forming a provisional government and also received 25 years imprisonment.

Dr Myint Naing contributed his political memoirs in the *Tidal Wave magazine*, which was published in the cell-compound. He was also a committee member of the CPPPR as well as the MAC. He took responsibility for being a staff editor of the *Tidal Wave* and was sentenced to an additional 5 years for panel code 6.

He is now in Thayet prison, middle Burma.

Kyaw Min Yu

Kyaw Min Yu, (aka) Jimmy, is a member of the DPNS Central Executive Committee and was arrested in 1989. At that time he was only

He is now in Bassein Prison and serving in restricted confinement as he refused to talk about his involvement when the ICRC met him exclusively.

Ko Ko Oo (aka) Bo Bo

Ko Ko Oo is an ABSDF member who was arrested in 1991 for possessing arms and received 10 years imprisonment.



He was a member of the HPPC in cellblock 3 and was one of the editorial staff for JAC's magazines. For this he received an additional 7 years imprisonment.

He is currently held in Myingyan Prison.

Ba Myo Thein

Ba Myo Thein, 44, is a member of the Democratic United Front and a strong supporter of U Nu, a former prime minister.



He was responsible for collecting articles from other cell-compounds and was also the chief editor of the *U Nu Memorial magazine*. He smuggled the maga-

zine out and sent it to U Nu's daughter, Daw San San Nu. He received a further 7 years and 5 years, altogether 12 years.

He is serving this sentence in Tharawaddy Prison.

Soe Myint

Soe Myint, 52, is a qualified veterinarian. In 1975 he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for participating in the students strike. Released in 1980, due to



a general amnesty, he was rearrested in 1982, accused of having connections with under-ground movements. He received an 8 year sentence but was released in 1987. In 1991 he was arrested again and sentenced to 10 years for involvement in under-ground movements.

Soe Myint is a musician and composer as well as being a good short-story writer. He wrote some poems in annual magazines during his student-days.

He contributed songs together with international notes in the *Tidal Wave* magazine. He also wrote short stories in the hand-written magazines that were circulated in Insein. He received an additional 5

member of the *New Blood Wave* and wrote poems in prison periodicals. He was sentenced to a further 7 years for his activities.

He is now in Myaungmya Prison.

Sein Hlaing

Sein Hlaing, 47, was a leading member of the Tri-color group. This group was responsible for the security of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in 1988. He cooperated with Myo Myint Nyein in delivering an anti-government satirical pamphlet called



"What is Occuring?". He was sentenced to 7 years for his involvement.

Sein Hlaing wrote articles in the prison-magazines and took the duty of distributing the periodicals among political prisoners. After participating in this movement he was sentenced to another 7 years imprisonment.

He is now in Tharawaddy Prison.

Win Thein

Win Thein was an active and leading member in the Tri-color group. He was also a member of NLD youth. He was arrested for al-

leged defiance against the junta's unjust law and received a 10-year sentence.

Win Thein was one of the editorial staff that produced the *New Blood Wave* magazine.

He was responsible for keeping and lending Time, Newsweek and Readers' digest as well as other books. He was sentenced to an additional 7 years imprisonment.

He is now in Tharawaddy Prison.

Tun Win

Tun Win, 48, was an Arakanese insurgent who participated in the taking of Minbya in 1986.

He managed to get a pocket radio and delivered news and information through 4(short) cellblock. He received 7 years in addition to his life sentence.



He is now detained in Tharawaddy Prison. None of his relatives can afford to visit him and he is suffering from gout.

Phyo Min Thein

Phyo Min Thein is a leading member of ABFSU, in Lower Burma. He was arrested in the 1991

" *Together With Infinite Strength*". He was a member of the news-bulletins producing team. For this, he received an additional 7 years imprisonment. He is now in Tharawaddy Prison.

Zaw Tun

Zaw Tun, 37, was a 3rd year Economics student and a leading member of the Workers' College Students' Union. Due to his connections with ABSDF he received 7 years imprisonment.

Zaw Tun wrote articles on political economy, which was published



in the Insein prison issues. He was also one of the prisoners responsible for

producing the *Diamond Jubilee magazine*. He was sentenced to a further 7 years.

He now serves in Tharawaddy Prison.

Nyunt Zaw

Nyunt Zaw was 24 when he was arrested in 1991, accused of being an ABSDF underground member. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

He helped to produce the news bulletins and gave them a neat and tidy appearance. He did this un-

der the watchful eye of the jail authorities, at night times, and was industrious and vigilant. He was sentenced to an additional 7 years and transferred to Tharawaddy Prison in September 1996.

There he was placed in solitary confinement and he suffered from heart disease. In mid-1999 his health condition deteriorated and he asked the jail authorities for health care. But MI did not give permission and Nyunt Zaw had a heart attack in his cell. He passed away while alone in his cell - nobody noticed. The jail authorities did not even send his death message to his family.

Kyi Pe Kyaw

Kyi Pe Kyaw, 36, is a member of ABSDF and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in 1990.

He and Myo Myint Nyein were the two most responsible for bringing out the weekly news-bulletin for the whole cell-compound.



Both of them were in room 17 of 4 (long) cellblock and their cell was

the news information headquarters. They made a secret underground hole where they stored everything for the bulletins and other periodicals.

Kyi Pe Kyaw was sentenced

About the author

Ko Myo was born in 1976. When the 1988 popular demonstration happened in Burma, he was 12 years old. However, despite his youth, he was able to participate by shouting slogans. He survived this period, even though many people were shot to death. Two years after the uprising in 1990, he was detained for one month for distributing pamphlets.

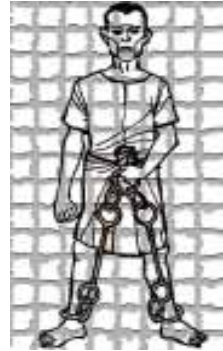
After his release, he was still secretly involved in the student movement and unfortunately, he was arrested again in 1994. This time he was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment with hard labor. He was released from prison in 1998. While in prison, because of his active participation in fighting against the unjust, he was brutally tortured. In 2000, he fled to the Thai-Burma border and is now a member of AAPP.

Spirit for Survival

We were given only unhealthy food.

If we talked to the prison staff,
we had to bow to the ground. Again,
this was an attempt to degrade us.

We were not allowed to talk to
our fellow prisoners
in neighbouring cells.



The person who cried like this was San Tun. He was a second year mathematic student before his arrest. He was put alone in an 8'x13' cell for years with no one to talk to. Everyday since arriving in Myingyan prison, he had been suffering from fear and want. Now, this man who was born a bright, normal person had become abnormal.

When I was thinking about him in my cell, the sound of beating came from his cell. A high-ranking prison staff shouted at him, "Hey man, why are you shouting? This is not the residence of your mother's partner! This is special jail. Do you want to die?"

San Tun was not the only one suffering from mental illness in Myingyan prison. Almost all activists who experience daily torture and ill-treatment are susceptible to mental illness, of which there are varying degrees. Naturally a human being is not accustomed to torture, harshness

and cruelty. So, the life of a prisoner in a Burmese prison is unnaturally controlled and manipulated. This treatment can affect a person's mind.

Political prisoners are forced to sit in the poun-zan position, which is used to destroy a person's dignity, for one or two hours while the rest of the criminals sit for no more than half an hour. Bathing time in Myingyan prison is set by the prison authorities and can vary from day to day. We were also forced to perform meaningless tasks such as: polishing the iron bars to make them as bright as platinum; polishing the ground as smooth as concrete; and catching flies.

We were given only unhealthy food. If we talked to the prison staff, we had to bow to the ground. Again, this was an attempt to degrade us. We were not allowed to talk to our fellow prisoners in neighbouring cells. Moreover, we were not allowed to share meals and or anything with

to him. He unintentionally cried, "The big bag is falling! The big bag is falling!" Both of them were beaten.

Aung Naing's mental illness was not left in the prison when he was released. It followed him throughout his whole life like a black shadow. His condition deteriorated outside prison. In his house, he behaved like he was still in prison. He slept on the floor and when his family served him a delicious meal, he asked to have a prison meal. His family members said in tears that he refused the meal they had prepared. He cried, "I will have the same meal as my fellow activists in prison." Now, he is not in the world any more. He passed away as a result of the mental sickness he got in prison.

Like him, another activist who died after release from Myingyan prison was Mayanthee, a Hindu man. He was in good health before his arrest. Ko Khin Maung Shwe of Monywa and Ko Aung Lin of Rangoon are still in the lunatic asylum after their release.

Recently, there has been bad news that a prominent activist Dr. Zaw Min has been suffering mental illness in Mandalay prison. He became well known for his political intellect. He is still imprisoned even though his prison period has already been completed. As far as I know,

Ko Kyaw Lwin, Ko Thiha and Ko Than Htut a.k.a. Balagyi have had the same experiences as him - Ten years in prison and mental sickness. When things like cars or houses are destroyed, they can be restored or replaced. However, we can't re-establish our lives in this way, no matter how much money we spend.

Some members of the international community are dealing with the Burmese military government despite the ill treatment and psychological torture of its political prisoners. These governments and organizations shouldn't neglect the stories of these men who have lost, or are losing, their sanity at the hands of this military dictatorship. They should consider this as they continue to water a poisonous plant.

The current media sometimes mentions prisons in Burma. However, the media is not able to cover the whole experience of an activist in the infamous prisons of our country. Some sections of the media neglect to mention the continuing torture and ill treatment, which happens daily in Burmese prisons. We feel hot when a coal from the fire drops on our feet. This kind of culture cannot attack the injustice in this world. It also cannot afford for the sake of peace in the world.

Ko Myo (AAPP)

About the Author

Naing Kyaw was born in Tavoy, Southern Burma. In 1987, He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography from Rangoon University.

During the 1988 uprising he joined the Association of Burmese Patriotic Youth (ABPY) and was a member of its Executive Committee.

He was arrested in March 1990 for political activity and sentenced to three years imprisonment. He served this sentence in Insein and Thayet prisons.

After his release, he participated in the December 1996 Student demonstrations in Rangoon and hid inside Burma for the following 8 months.

Naing Kyaw then left for liberated area on the Thai-Burma border in September 1997. He is the secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), AAPP.

His real name is Ko Tate.

People were chatting here and there and giving their opinion on what had happened. However, it was obvious that their faces were overwhelmed with grief. I could see the anger in the youth who signed the condolence book. Cherry, I could see the tears roll from their faces as they wrote in that book. They were feeling weary with anxiety.

Before we placed your dead body in the crematorium, everybody who attended your funeral stood quietly for one minute to pay their last respects to you. Afterwards, two of your friends carried the wreath; a black piece of cloth was attached with words written in red:

**A wreath for Cherry
(or)
a star fallen before sunrise
From your friends**

Those friends who took the wreath marched to the crematorium but their steps were unwilling. But you could not have known that you were being taken there as you lay silently in the coffin. I felt really sad for you Cherry and choked with emotion.

I was hit by the flame produced by the crematorium. It ate your body and your misery. At the same

time I could see your experiences and I could see you.

Cherry, You were actively involved in the fight against the dictatorship and the struggle for democracy. In 1988, when the junta allowed the people to set up political parties, you joined the National League for Democracy (NLD). Then you became one of the leaders of Mayangon township NLD youth wing, in Rangoon.

When I was in prison I stayed in the same room as your father, U Khin Maung Nyunt. Your father was a leader as well-of the Patriotic Old Comrades League. That is why he was arrested and sentenced by a military tribunal to serve 5 years



10,1991, there was a peaceful demonstration in support of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who was awarded the Noble Peace Prize. University students celebrated this

Your arrest brought more suffering for your family. Like trouble upon trouble, they were forced to leave their home by the authorities.

demonstration in the Rangoon Arts and Science University honoring the people's leader. We heard that you had bravely participated in it. I honored you for your courage but we soon learnt that the junta had forcefully dispersed the demonstration and over 200 students were arrested. You were one of them. After that you were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment with hard labor by a military tribunal.

Your arrest brought more suffering for your family. Like trouble upon trouble, they were forced to leave their home by the authorities. Many families have been forced to relocate as their properties are resumed to make way for new projects. A plot of land is provided as compensation and they are allowed to take as much of their old house as they can carry. This usually leaves the affected family without a home.

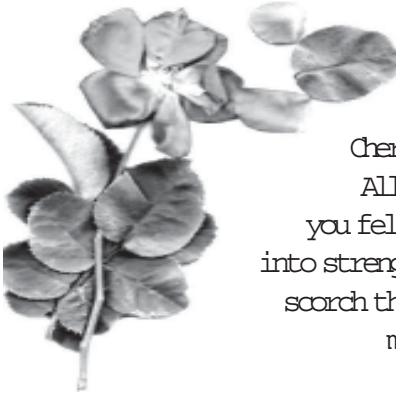
When I heard this I felt really sad for your mother because I knew she could not afford to build a new house. She had already sold all of her possessions to support

the family while your father was imprisoned. So she had no choice but to sell the new plot of land to be able to rent a house in the suburban area.

In 1992, senior general Saw Maung, who took control of the state by force in 1988, retired. General Than Shwe then became the chairperson of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). When he took power, in order to receive international support, he gave a SLORC amnesty (11/92). That amnesty said that anyone who was considered not to be a danger to the country must be released as soon as possible. You can imagine how happy we all were. We believed that we would all be considered innocent.

For the next few days, we waited for the time our names would be called out. But very few of us who had not completed our sentences were released. All our hopes were in vain.

Spirit for Survival



Cherry, believe us.
All the suffering
you felt - we will change
into strength. We will erode and
scorch their oppression with
molten lava.

believe but I had to believe.

Cherry, you succeeded in killing yourself. The news of your death spread quickly across the country.

You drank the poisonous anti-insect killer. Didn't you? It produced a very bad smell but you were not afraid of drinking it.

You knew our Buddha's doctrine: When one kills oneself, one will go into hell repeatedly 500 times. What drove you to do it?

I prayed for you in front of the Buddha image to spare you this fate because you were the victim of a cruel dictatorship.

Under an authoritarian system where a human being isn't recognized as a human being, we lose the difference between 'human being' and 'not being' as well as our

freedom.

Cherry, believe us. All the suffering you felt -we will change into strength. We will erode and scorch their oppression with molten lava.

This grief, this feeling of deep hurt and bitterness will become a volcano, which is going to explode.

After that, Cherry, it will blow up the place where your dead body was---

Nonetheless, I dare say, you will be with us forever until the world ceases to exist.

Cherry, I hope, although your life was sacrificed somewhere amid this unfulfilled revolution, before the sun has risen, your soul will always be in our hearts.

I deeply remember you,

Naing Kyaw

door to find more than a half-dozen military officers with weapons drawn.

His last night at home ended earlier than he had expected. The professor was arrested immediately and thrown into prison, accused of organising students for armed struggle and shortly thereafter sentenced to 10 years' incarceration.

Prison life

"Burmese prison life is the worst in the world." Aye Chan Explains calmly, sitting in an office at bucolic Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, Mass. Where he is a visiting professor. "Many political prisoners have died in jail in Burma."

He and other prisoners started a hunger strike in September of that year to protest conditions at Insein Central Jail. He remembers shouting slogans, calling for the overthrow of the military government. Adrenaline coursed through the corridors of the prison. The shouting intensified, the cacophony growing in volume.

Two guards removed Aye Chan from his cell and marched him off to an interrogation room, where he was beaten. He was kicked repeatedly and hit with a rubber pipe. At least one rib was cracked possibly more.

Then he was blindfolded

and tied to a chair in an upright position for three straight days. He received an injection in the back of his neck. To this day he doesn't know what he was given. It made him dizzy. If he appeared to be falling to sleep, a guard hit him.

"I was not afraid. This might sound like boasting, but it is not," he says, running his left hand through thick black hair. "I thought they were going to hang me. If I was killed, that's the way of dying as a hero. That's what I was thinking at the moment."

Aye Chan was then transferred to a different prison, Tharawady Jail, where he was placed in solitary confinement for five years.

"It was not a hard time for me," he says. "I meditated most of the day. It is a very good weapon to fight the time, being mindful to the body, concentrating on breathing. I'm not a religious Buddhist, but I know how to meditate."

An iron fist

Burma, officially renamed Myanmar in 1989 by the military government that has ruled the former British colony with an iron fist since 1962, is bordered by Bangladesh to the west and Thailand to the east. It is on the Bay of Bengal.

Once the richest nation in Southeast Asia, the country of more

in 1983, he gladly accepted. Even though his wife of five years and their young daughter were not allowed to leave the country with him. Aye Chan spent the better part of five years in Japan, where he became fast friends with Suu Kyi, who was also studying there.

Student demonstrations were a regular occurrence at Rangoon University when Aye Chan returned to Burma on March 31, 1988. He was sympathetic to the student movement, regularly serving as an advisor to the young men and women pushing to have democracy replace the military government.

Many student leaders fled to Thailand, and Aye Chan had planned to join them. But he was arrested May 17, 1990, and sentenced to prison. His only outside contact was 15-minute visits with his wife and daughter every two weeks. They were supervised, and he was permitted to discuss only family matters.

On June 20, 1997, he was released. Thirteen months later, he came to Great Barrington.

A provost's decision

U Ba Win, the provost at Simon's Rock for almost 30 years, is a Burmese native and was instrumental in Aye Chan being granted visit-

ing professor status at the liberal arts college in the Berkshires. Ba Win was childhood friends with Aye Chan's wife, whom Aye Chan requested not be identified by name because she wants to be able to return to Rangoon to see family.

Ba Win had been looking into helping the family in 1990, before Aye Chan was arrested. After his release from prison in 1997, he contacted Ba Win. This time the Simon's Rock provost was able to help him escape although not for almost a full year, a period almost as painful as prison because Aye Chan was unable to get work.

Despite their common ethnic heritage, Ba Win and Aye Chan are not intimate. Ba Win says he has to this day never asked Aye Chan what he did to land in prison in Rangoon in 1990.

"I just know that he got into trouble and he was sent to jail. We haven't really sat down and talked politics with each other," Ba Win says. "I don't like the idea of people being imprisoned, and that's enough for me to help them out. I don't care what their politics are."

"In the end, if I was to limit myself by helping only people opposing the military regime, that would be politics sticking its head up again. I

About the Author,

Kyaw Zwa Moe took part in the democracy movement of 1988, when he was a high school student. In December 1991, he was arrested in connection with the "10 December" student demonstration, a peaceful expression of approval for the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Later, he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and was incarcerated in the cell of Insein annex jail, known as Special Prison. He was moved to Tharawaddy prison 2 years before he was released.

Although having passed his high school examination in 1991, he didn't have a chance to attend university after his arrest. So he enrolled in the Dagon University when he was released, to continue his education. He was allowed to attend the university but he couldn't study anything there because it was closed. Last year, he left the country, to avoid being arrested again.

Now, Kyaw Zwa Moe, 30, is a researcher for Thailand based Irrawaddy magazine where he has been writing news and articles on Burma related issues and his own experience in prisons.

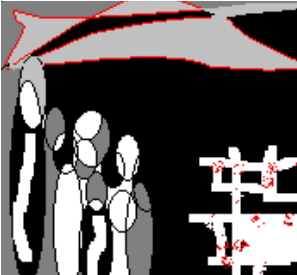
After the Burmese military crushed the 1988 calls for democracy by massacring thousands of peaceful demonstrators throughout Burma, peaceful demonstrations and political rallies of any sort ceased to exist in Burma and universities around the country have also been closed. However, one request of the democracy activists that was granted by the ruling military regime was the promise of a democratic election in Burma. In 1990 the military regime held that election. The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory.

Governments around the world recognized the results and Burmese citizens were exuberant over the outcome. Regardless of the celebration, the ruling junta, then known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) did not recognize these elections in any

way.

A year passed with the election continuing to go unrecognized and it had been three years since the massacre of 1988. The regime had almost, so they thought, totally extinguished the flame of democracy in Burma. To those in the movement it was a flame that would continuously burn for the sake of the country and to those that had already given their lives to the cause. Therefore it became essential to re-ignite the fire at all costs.

Early in 1991 the government had reopened the universities after a three-year closure. Towards the end of 1991 the students had begun to mobilize again. Then on human right's day, December 10, as NLD-leader Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in absentia for her efforts to restore democracy in Burma, the students chose to re-light the democracy



The students marched up and down the famous main avenue of the campus, Adipati Avenue, chanting slogans and denouncing the injustices of their government.

Spirit for Survival

After three months of mental and physical abuse,
the military tribunals, organized solely for
political activists after the 1988 uprising,
handed down sentences from
ten-to-twenty years to all of the 136 students arrested
that day, including a number of female students.

f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F f F

young to shoulder the burden of a country in such dire straits, it was their belief that they had to at least try.

On this day the junta, once again, lived up to its barbaric and violent reputation. When they finally descended upon the demonstrators, hundreds of students were forcibly rounded up, beaten and thrown in jail ending yet another peaceful protest in utter violence. At that time the military regime again shut down all universities and colleges in Burma, fearing that the small fire of democracy lit in Rangoon may burst into flames throughout the country. The students who were arrested that day were severely beaten and tortured in the interrogation centers of the Military Intelligence (MI). After three months of mental and physical abuse, the military tribunals, organized solely for political activists after the 1988 uprising, handed down sen-

tences from ten-to-twenty years to all of the 136 students arrested that day, including a number of female students. This was the first large-scale student demonstration since the 1988 uprising, where thousands of innocent Burmese were killed.

Ironically, these same students who fought so hard for freedom and democracy and struggled to bring it to the citizens of their homeland, entirely lost their own personal freedom that day. They were plucked from the warm net of their family and friends and thrown into a totally unfamiliar and uninviting environment. They were now to enter a place with lifeless gray walls, cold-iron bars, heavy shackles and bone-crushing bludgeons. Just three months before they were thumbing through textbooks, listening to the sweet and vibrant sounds of their co-eds and enjoying the education that was deemed so necessary by them. Once

About the author

Sai Win Kyaw was a captain in the Burmese army until the 1988 popular uprising. During the uprising, he realised that people were being brutally oppressed by the one party authoritarian system. He had seen how Army chief commanders and officers were abusing their power and, therefore, joined the demonstrations on September 9, 1988. He conducted a press conference on September 14, 1988, officially denouncing the chief commanders and the one party authoritarian system. For this, he was sentenced to the death penalty, in absentia, after the army forcefully took power again on September 18, 1988. However, his sentence was reduced to 20 years imprisonment with hard labor by four star general, Saw Maung.

When he was in prison, he participated in the fight between political prisoners and prison officers on September 25 of 1990.

He was brutally beaten and transferred to Thayet prison for his role in the strike.

In 1993, he received a SLORC amnesty (1/93) and his sentence was reduced to 10 years. As a result, after staying in both Insein and Thayet prison for 7 years and 2 months, he was finally released on December 17, 1996 from Thayet prison. While in prison, he was locked in a tiny cell for over four years. He fled to the Thai-Burma border in 2000 and remains actively involved in the struggle for Democracy and Human Rights. In the mean time, he writes a series by the name of "A sword among the flames," based on his experience in jail, and announces it on Radio Free Asia.

Spirit for Survival

It was shocking, as I had not had such an experience before. Why did I need to be questioned as I was already sentenced? Would it be more interrogation or another trial? Was there anything wrong with my answers in the previous interrogation period? There were many things to worry about. I was anxious. See, the time was almost 5:00 p.m. in the evening and the prison was about to close. Now there would be more questions and answers and I felt nervous. My experience in the interrogation period had been really terrifying, like others' and not unusual.

I was touched with cigarette tips, beaten and knocked around, hung upside-down with my legs tied to the ceiling. Water was poured on my head and my face covered with a plastic sheet. A wooden rod rolled along my shins. I was forced to stand in a half-sitting position and stretch out my arms as if I were holding onto the handles of a motorbike. I was to shout in the voice of a motorbike engine while I was to call out where

I arrived, when I changed gears, stepped on the break, and pushed the horn. I was not allowed to rest and drove a long time. I have so much to write down about that terrible experience, it could be a thick book.

Now, I thought, do I have to face the same experience? I thought I had had enough experiences. Military Intelligence (MI) mostly managed interrogations in the prison. They could behave as they liked because they

had the authority to do so.

I was not able to refuse and listened to them as if I was water in their hand. I

was in prison so there was no way to run. That's why I changed my dress and stepped outside my cell. My head was hooded and two prison officers dragged and led me to a place I did not know in advance. This is the life of political prisoner under the military regime. Locked in a tiny cell, it was as if my eyes and ears were blocked. When I stepped down from my cell, my eyes were blocked again.

Finally the hood on my head was removed. I was in a room lit with

I was touched with cigarette tips,
beaten and knocked around, hung
upside-down with
my legs tied to the ceiling.
Water was poured on my head.
My face covered with
a plastic sheet.

conditions. "No rights to listen the radio, write or read. No newspaper. No talking to the prisoners in the other rooms. Even during family visit time (15 minutes every two weeks), no politics in conversation. "Do I have to stay in this condition till I am released?" He answered that he knew nothing and it was up to his superior and he had to work according to the orders. I asked him to report my condition and he said that he would.

This was only an introduction to the exam. The prison staff had left as soon as he arrived and signaled for them to go out. So there were only two of us in the room, he and I. He ordered a cup of tea and a pack of cigarettes and asked for my personal data. He asked very detailed questions about my parents, siblings, the places I had lived, the jobs I had held and how I came to be in prison. He sometimes opened the folder and checked my answers with the data in his file. After the questions, he revealed the matter of importance: why I urgently had been interviewed again. The MI wanted to know about my political opinions. He asked me to fill out the form in my own handwriting. He also warned me to think carefully as it would affect my future life. The paper sheets were on the table. I was told to write as long as I could. I just said

"Okay" when he said that he would be outside the room.

When he left the room, I looked at the questions. It was a short questionnaire. What was my opinion on the Tatmadaw (armed forces), the military-sponsored national convention, the National League for Democracy (NLD) (the political party which had won by a landslide victory in the 1990 elections), NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the slogan of the military government, the Tatmadaw's plan to participate in a future leading political role, the 1988 democracy uprising and my activities, the 1988 military coup, military leaders, the exiled democracy forces and my future political plans. There were over ten questions. The last paragraph was a proposal. It asked whether I could promise to quit acting out against the military government if I were to be released unexpectedly. Did I agree that my actions had violated the current laws, orders and state security? From the humanitarian point of view, the authorities would kindly consider my release if I agreed to and signed the above-mentioned two statements. Under the questions, there were blanks in which to write my name, my father's name, my sentence, section and date.

That was the exam I had inside prison. Actually, it was only an

About the Author,

Khin Maung Soe was born at Hmawbi Township in Rangoon Division on March 9, 1954.

He was detained after the student movements of December 1974, for U Thant - a former United Nations General Secretary, and June 1975, at Shwedagon pagoda while attending his second year in Workers' College(RASU).

He decided to avoid government jobs and earned a living as a trishaw driver for one and half years from 1977 to 78.

Then he became a photojournalist in 1978 and has about 80 cover photos and 100 articles in various Burmese magazines. He was a video producer and cameraman at T&T studios, where they produced the first news video magazine in Burma called "Monitor" in 1991 until he left Burma in Feb 27,1993.

He actively participated in the 1988 uprising and joined Aung San Suu Kyi. Later, he discovered that the Media is the best means to support democracy and human rights on earth.

Currently, he lives in the United State and works for Radio Free Asia (RFA) as a broadcaster. In the meantime, he is one of the founders of the Burmese Media Association.

There were a lot of rats (we called them "**Underground Fighters**") in our cell. Actually rats, like the cheroots, were luxuries in prison. You could trade rats easily for money, but they weren't easy to find since everybody wanted them. We were living in a prohibited area and only limited persons were allowed to come to see us. Security was very tight here as if we were VIPs. Ha! Ha!

They lived underneath our cells. Almost every room has entrances for rats. There was an entrance about five inches wide in the corner of our room. They didn't come out at daytime and there was no sign they were there. But when the whole prison went silent after nine o'clock, they appeared. They made noises while searching for food and when they fought among themselves. They didn't care about us and even ran over our feet. Sometimes they bit our nails. Some of them were huge, and would weigh about three pounds and

some parts of their skin had no hair. They were old but very strong.

So, at the time, except for Gen. Ne Win and his loyalists, only those rats had freedom as their birth right in Burma. The difference was Gen. Ne Win and his followers were going abroad all the time, but those rats chose to stay inside the cells. The similarity was that Gen. Ne Win and his group could have had all the delicious food they wanted, and the rats could have all the rotten rice they wanted. But their fortunes were soon changed.

At first, there were arguments among us. Tun Aung said it was a cruel thing and he would feel guilty as a Buddhist. Myo Thant said, "They may have diseases." But when I explained that it was for our survival, Myo Thant supported me and in a democratic way, we, the majority, approved the plan.

As there were no more objections to my proposal, I made a

The similarity was that Gen. Ne Win and his group could have had all the delicious food they wanted, and the rats could have all the rotten rice they wanted.
But their fortunes were soon changed.

Now, the military authorities are claiming that they are working towards democracy- this must be a fantasy. How can authorities, who are so afraid to grant basic democratic rights to people, build or construct democracy. The fact is that the present military authorities are in great fear of people power. Their minds seem to be set on the idea that only by keeping the people crushed and subjugated can they exist.

Such people can never construct democracy.

Aung San Suu Kyi

THE BIGGEST **FORCED-LABOR CAMP** IN THE WORLD

By **ZIN LINN**



tivities.

The junta has also arrested hundreds of students for their political activities against militarism. The 1988 pro-democracy movement was led by students, who have traditionally been at the forefront of political struggle in Burma. Although thousands of student activists fled to neighboring countries after the military seized power on September 18, 1988, others continue the struggle inside the country. They have been subjected to the same fate as the NLD and other opposition party members who were arrested unlawfully.

There are about 1800 political prisoners according to Amnesty International's 2001 Report. Political prisoners are at risk of torture with every minute in the hands of Military Intelligence personnel (MI). They are also vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment after sentencing, when they can be punished for breaking arbitrary prison rules or rules contained in the jail manual, such as possessing writing paper. Moreover, authorities use criminal prisoners to work in labor-intensive camps, breaking up stones in quarry mines or constructing roads. Conditions are so harsh that several thousands have reportedly died due to persecution, overwork, and lack of nourishment and medical care.

Once, in 1982 during the reign of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), I was sentenced to two years imprisonment under security Act 5 (j). There, unexpectedly, I met one of my classmates, a junior jail officer, who just came back from a labor-intensive camp situated on the Rangoon-Mandalay New Highway Project. As he was a pious Buddhist, he regretted what he had done to carry out the project. According to his narration, the police, the courts and the prison authorities are instructed to join together in finding



Every day the total number of prisoners would always exceed 12,000 - excluding the prisoners sent to the remote labor-intensive camps. At least 1000 prisoners a week were being sent to those hellish camps. There was a period of a month where this figure increased to 5000 yet, amazingly, the daily total remained above 12,000. What was going on in those days?

We, the prisoners of conscience, were always alert to the chance of collecting information from ordinary prisoners, as well as wardens. Most wardens came to their duty-post without carrying a lunch-box. They had to ask for their meals from the political prisoners. We were able to provide them with some preserved food, given to us by our families when they visited. For this reason the wardens gave us all of

their information. We received stories on everything from the chief jail-master's adultery to a series of corruption scandals involving MI. So, getting the daily roll of the incoming prisoners was easy.

There are over 40 townships in the Rangoon Municipality area. Every police station must send detainees to the Insein Prison as a daily routine at dusk. On average, each police station sends about 30 detainees. In this way, every evening, there are over 1200 names in the jail register-book. Within a week or two, a respective court sentences each detainee. They get a minimum of six months to a maximum of three years even if they haven't committed a crime. At the trial, the judge tells them frankly that if they refuse to confess their guilt, the sentence will be doubled. The judge also tells them

that the top brass generals who make the decisions. Under such conditions, the detainee has no choice but to accept the sentence. Such summary courts are unacceptable in a civilized society.

According to their stories, most of the detainees are arrested while on their way to



farmer on the village track to contribute free labor to the irrigation scheme for a month, without any financial assistance. Those who failed to participate in the scheme were arrested and sentenced to one-year imprisonment with hard labor. During his arrest, the police seized some of his livestock illegally. In this way, the police became a gang of robbers with a license.

A great number of lower class citizens are victimized under the junta's man-hunting scheme and the prisons inside Burma are crowded with innocent people.

Why has the junta launched such a violent man-hunting scheme? It is a very interesting question. Most Burmese nationals know the answer very well. The junta, in trying to deceive the international community into believing their administration is noble-minded, has built roads, bridges, railways, airports, dams, irrigation and even religious buildings. They have accomplished a great deal of infrastructure. What they hope for in return is to be recognized as a legitimate government and for current for sanctions to be lifted.

But they can't see they have made a careless mistake. They have built this infrastructure with the lives

of a great number of forced laborers. Actually, the junta's man-hunting scheme is nothing less than the conscription of an enormous mass of forced labor.

The police forces have become man-hunting units and the courts and judges are willing supporters of this infrastructure-building program. The prison-officers and the wardens are the drivers of this forced labor machine. Without adding small camps and branches there are over 300 labor-intensive camps holding innocent prisoners. Like Jewish-internment camps under the Nazis, many prisoners are treated as though they are animals.

The most deadly camps are at quarry mines. One notorious camp is near the Sittaung river bridge and is known as Taung-zun quarry site. According to a reliable source, Thein Tun who was the jail master at Taung-zun quarry may have come straight from the 'devil's hell'. He has committed many extra-judicial killings, with one of his assistant officers, Tint Swe, as his accomplice. Both wardens and prisoners know his assistant as *Dah* Tint Swe. *Dah* in Burmese language is a sword or dagger. Tint Swe has killed many prisoners with his *Dah*. When a prisoner's health dete-

that the jail-master fed the delicious food to his dogs in front of the suffering prisoner. Then he told his wardens to drag the man into the bushes and ordered *Dah Tint Swe* to follow after them.

According to Min Khin, many prisoners commit suicide due to the strain of hard labor as well as the brutal treatment. This is usually carried out by throwing oneself under a lorry or train. Some choose to dive from the mountaintop onto the rocky ground below. Min Khin said the monthly death toll at the quarry was nearly 300. But no-one in authority notices the rocketing death toll because all of the prison authorities get a regular share of the bribe. If one prisoner ceases to be, two more can be found to fill the void. "They don't care about human life!" exclaimed Min Khin.

"The worst thing is every prisoner has to suffer this in iron-shackles like a beast!"

There are numerous prisons and labor-intensive camps throughout Burma. There are numerous infrastructure con-

struction sites in Burma. How many tonnes of stone do they need for these construction sites? How can anyone believe that the value of this stone is equal to the value of a human being's soul?

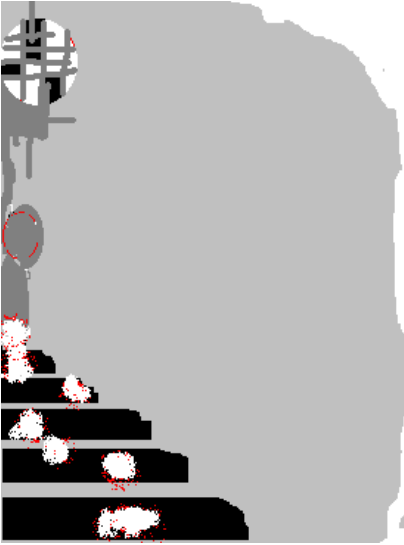
There was another *ye-bet* who fled from the Zin-kyeik labor-intensive camp, in Mon State, to the Thai-Burma border in mid-July 2001. His name was Ko Kyaw Lwin, of Pa-an township, and he was sentenced to 7 years, accused of having connections to the rebels. He was sent to the notorious Zin-kyeik camp, which is also a quarry site. There are always about 2500 *ye-bets* working under harsh conditions at this site. Just like Taung-zun, the prison-authorities treat the prisoners without sympathy. The working hours are from 4 a.m. to 9 p.m. and the meals consist of rice



About the author

Maung Maung Taik was born in 1950. He started participating in the political struggle in 1974 while in his final year of Psychology at Rangoon Art and Science University. His involvement in politics led to his arrest in that same year and he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment. After being released, he continued his work for the movement - still thirsting for Democracy. As a result, he was thrown behind bars once again, charged under section 5/j, and was sentenced to 7 years. Three years after his release, he faced another peoples' uprising in 1988 and he also devoted himself to this democracy movement. Thousands of people including monks, women, students, workers were killed or arrested during this time, and many fled to the Thai-Burma border to continue the unfinished struggle.

Maung Maung Taik was one of these people and he soon joined the student Army (All Burma Student Democratic Front) (ABSDF). He is now living on the Thai-Burma border and remains a member of the ABSDF.



During that time, we university students were put in prison. One of my prison mates, a lawyer called Kyaw Linn, named that period "the long-haired revolution" because over 2000 of the students who participated in the U Thant demonstration had long hair. Actually, we not only had long hair, which changes over time, but also activities for the country and people. To give some examples, we participated in June 1974 labor strike and student demonstrations.

I sometimes think about those activities and am reminded of someone. He is Ko Tin Maung Oo, a Chin ethnic student who was the first political prisoner to face the death sentence after the Socialist military junta took power in 1962.

I can still hear his speech. "Look back at the year 1962. Students were brave enough to participate in political activities---". Under the hot afternoon sun, holding a microphone in one hand and standing on a car, he talked to students. It was during the U Thant demonstration. The junta had been jealous of U Thant, a Burmese diplomat who became Secretary General of the United Nations (from 1961 to 1971). The junta was running the country into isolation and economic ruin; U Thant was receiving international respect for his handling of various crises during the Cold War era. After he died in New York, his body was flown back to Rangoon, but the junta ordered that no state official should meet the body and he would be simply buried like any other ordinary person. His body

"Now, we students are going to manage the funeral!"

It was Ko Tin Maung Oo. The crowd applauded his announcement and four or five Red Cross members who were near the corpse left.

Eight people were given the death sentence.

Ko Tin Maung Oo was one.

They were fed good rice with thick pea curry
in the morning and meat curry in the evening.

They shared their quota with
the prison staffs and sometimes with us.

us brutally. We were beaten and pulled out to the cells on death row. Some of us passed out. 5 to 8 of us were put in the 8' x 12' cells. We secretly planned to continue the hunger strike until we died. We were all very young, aged between 15 and 25 years old.

The experience was totally terrible. The weather was hot and we weren't allowed change of dress. For the toilet, there were only two bowls at the corner of the cell. Those two bowls were full and overflowed with urine. The cells were very small so we had to stand up.

Eight people were given the death sentence. Ko Tin Maung Oo was one. They were fed good rice with thick pea curry in the morning and meat curry in the evening. They shared their quota with the prison staffs and sometimes with us. However, we did not want to take those special meals from the people who were waiting to be killed.

One day, one of the cell-mates who went outside to clean the toilet bowl came back with a letter from Tin Maung Oo. He used to talk with his close friends while pretending he was exercising. He was handsome as he had a tight muscular body and healthy skin. While exercising in short pants, he was like a beauty king.

While we started to read the letter about the hunger strike in Hall 3, a prison officer came in and seized it. We shouted at him as he beat our friend who had brought the letter. The staff also shouted at us from the corridor. Tin Maung Oo arrived near us then. "Give the letter to me!" he ordered the staff, who handed it to him. After reading the letter, he chewed and swallowed it. And then, he challenged the staff in a karate position, "What are you going to do to me? Do you dare to kill me?" We saw it clearly as it happened right in front of our cell. The arrogant staff

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 pro-democracy 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. He was charged under section 5(J) of the 1960 Emergency Provision Act and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment with hard labor. At the time of his arrest, he was working for the ABFSU and was also carrying out duties for the NLD youth.

While in Insein special prison he met Mr. James Leander Nichols and learnt 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 had to seek intensive medical treatment due to the harsh conditions in prison.

He left Burma in 1997 and has written a number of articles about the prisons and political prisoners in Burma. Currently he lives in Norway and is working for the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). He still suffers from serious health problems.

In 1991, I was detained in cell block No.1 of Insein Special Jail (ISJ - formerly called the Attached Jail). Although it is a special jail, the only special privilege provided was "special solitary confinement".

The chief prison doctor was Dr. Soe Kyi, and his assistants were Dr. Tun Tun and Dr. Aung Than Myint.

During those days, Dr. Soe Kyi was the most powerful man in the prison because of his relationship with former Home Minister Lt-Gen Phone Myint.

Almost every Wednesday, the chief warden made his rounds and checked to see if the prisoners in ISJ had any complaints or requests. All officials in the prison, including prison medical officers, had to accompany him on his rounds. It was the only time we had a right to see a prison doctor.

Apart from Wednesdays, we could only see a "medical worker" between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.. At ISJ, our "medical worker" was Corporal Khin Maung Nwe who had little clinical knowledge or experience. If one wanted to see him, first one needed to inform the head of the cell-block.

However, to see a doctor on Wednesday, a patient was humbly made to stand head down and with hands crossed over the groin area in

Regardless of the affliction, all patients were treated with the same medicines, usually a weak painkiller like Burspro or an antacid called Antacin.

All the prisoners began calling Khin Maung Nwe "Mr. Burspro!"

his cell. Passing officials would peer into the cells, asking the sick what they had to say.

The doctor never gave actual examinations, but only asked us what was wrong. Then he would tell Khin Maung Nwe what type of pills to give the patient. But we were never told what type of medicine was prescribed to us.

Our blood pressure and heartbeat were never tested and we never saw a doctor with a stethoscope. Regardless of the affliction, all patients were treated with the same medicines, usually a weak painkiller like Burspro or an antacid called Antacin. All the prisoners began calling Khin Maung Nwe "Mr. Burspro!"

It's strange - isn't it? We were given the same treatment even

"No. I'm not a dentist," Dr. Soe Kyi said coyly and went away. Until the beginning of 1995 there was no dentist in the prison hospital.

In late February 1991, Toe Toe Tun from the Democratic Party for a New Society, suffered from dysentery and asked Dr. Soe Kyi to authorize special meals of porridge and boiled water. Not unexpectedly, Dr. Soe Kyi said, "It is impossible to provide boiled water. We don't even have boiled water to clean the needles at our hospital." In March 1991, Moe Zaw Oo (NLD- Youth) developed a large boil on his hip. Khin Maung Nwe said a doctor wouldn't give him any treatment, even if he were allowed to see one. Khin Maung Nwe offered to remove the boil himself.

Moe Zaw Oo already had a high temperature due to the infection and there was an insufficient amount of post-treatment antibiot-

ics available so he refused the offer, insisting to see a doctor.

Finally, Dr. Soe Kyi came and said, "Your boil needs to be operated on."

"But if you continue to complain, I'll send you to the hospital," the doctor threatened. "So you better not be concerned about HIV. There is no operating room or sterile medical equipment and you know there are many HIV positive Thai patients there."

Moe Zaw Oo familiar with the risks of the hospital treatment asked the doctor: "What should I do? You are a doctor, can you help me?" "Never forget the fact that this is a prison", was Dr. Soe Kyi's only reply. Then he left, telling Khin Maung Nwe to treat Moe Zaw Oo as he saw fit.

Khin Maung Nwe told us prisoners that the prison would not provide new blades, bandages, alcohol

"But if you continue to complain, I'll send you to the hospital," the doctor threatened.
"So you better not be concerned about HIV.
There is no operating room or sterile medical equipment and you know there are many HIV positive Thai patients there."

About the Author

Thet Hmu was a member of the Students' Union in 1988 and later, a member of the Democratic Party for New Society.

He participated in the political opposition movement inside Burma and was arrested on October 22, 1990. He was released from Tharawaddy prison in April, 1996. After participating in the student demonstrations in December 1996, he left the country and currently lives in exile.

It was the prison employee in charge of our section. He flitted along the corridor of the special hall. I saw him moving around the east wing of the prison and then heading toward the west wing where we lived. The west wing was still silent. The prison guard, or "hall-in-charge," was only about twenty steps away and the silence in our barracks was unbearable. I was upset and later would regret my decision, but I shouted the word 'poun-zan' at the top of my voice to wake my fellow inmates.

The word 'poun-zan' is prison terminology, which literally means to assume the squatting position with fistful hands on one's knees. It is an order to be followed strictly by each and every inmate at the designated time everyday, whenever a prison official walks in, similar to the military command 'attention.' But I find it extremely degrading to hear a loud mechanical voice shout 'poun-zan.' I also believe this system was introduced at every prison in our country with the objective of mentally torturing and eventually, dehumanizing the prisoners.

This command is usually followed by beatings with rubber-clad iron pipes, bamboo sticks and the sounds of ankle chains and the 'daut', an iron rod fitted on ankle chains that keeps legs constantly stretched apart, thus preventing normal walking. In addition to these, tear gas bombs and other types of weapons are waiting on the sidelines to crush those who try to move.

If any inmate refuses to follow the sitting ritual, all inmates of that barrack must do 'poun-zan' for sometimes up to 240 hours, sometimes from ten days to one year, depending on the seriousness of the act of disobedience. According to our prison regulations we must perform the sitting ritual twice a day. In the morning, we must do 'poun-zan htaing' (sitting prison style) from 5:00 am to 6:30 or 7 am when the sentry would signal for the opening of the prison hall doors. This exercise is repeated in the evening from 5:00 to 6:30 pm. When all prison doors are closed. If a prison officer walks along the hall way, we have to do the sitting. If an inmate has done something that breaks prison regulations, he must do 'poun-zan htaing' most of the day, stopping only when he sleeps.

A prison warden or someone in charge of the prison hall usually comes to inspect us performing our regular sitting duties. He counts the number of inmates in our barracks. If he makes a mistake in counting or finds somebody missing, we are doomed to do the sitting ritual through the

tained as a small museum. Inside the cell is a picture of Saya San and a brief biography. Only prisoners of the Tharrawaddy jail are allowed to visit there and pay tribute to Saya San. On the wall hangs a sign: "Maximum Security Prison Cells." It is in these cells where we made our home.

Walking through a small door of the brick wall that surrounded the east wing, I arrived at the main jail compound. In front of me lay a long stretch of ground covered with beautiful multi-colored flowers and a green carpet of vegetable fields. Prisoners in dirty, shabby uniforms, which were originally, but no longer, white, were busy digging, carrying earth and moving broken bricks. Some were weeding the fields. The scene of prisoners working in the jail compound looked very much like a foreign movie depicting medieval slaves toiling in the fields owned by their landlords. I felt like a patient whose head has been bandaged for many weeks and has had the bandages removed for the first time. For years I had been shut off from the outside world and suddenly, I found myself a free man, ready to start a new life.

After going through a series of interrogations, I got a chance to see the chief jailer. It is a prison tradition that the chief jailer meets every inmate who receives a release order. I thought that he would most probably tell me that I should behave well when I got out of prison, however, when I sat at his desk he did not give me such advice. Rather, he said that prison authorities had made every effort to enable prisoners to fully enjoy their rights. He also explained that in some cases, though they had sympathy towards prisoners because they were government service personnel, the prison officials were not able to allow prisoners to do certain things -- they could get fired or they might be given jail terms for not strictly following the orders from their superiors.

I told him that I understood very well the peculiar situation they were in. I went on to say that he should not go beyond the legal limits, and should always hold the view that prisoners are also human beings. The officer seemed to agree with what I had said.

The jailer, U Hla Tun, was new, recently transferred to Tharrawaddy. He and I went on to have a friendly conversation. He began asking me about my plans for the future. He said he would like to know what type of business I would take up; he also wanted to know whether I would leave the country. With a smile, I replied that I would

Many a time I had been to secret interrogation camps run by Military Intelligence. Several times I had been at secret military tribunals. So it was hard to believe that I could be in prison for six years without knowing anything about a police lock-up, police station, judge, attorney or be aware of the provisions of the law. When I was thrown into jail the judicial machinery seemed to be afraid of me.

It was strange. I did not have the opportunity to go through the normal judicial channels. Even the colonels from the military tribunal looked nervous when they read out the order handing down my prison term. They did it and then they abruptly left.

After I was arrested I was taken to a small building enclosed by several walls of wire mesh with only one door. It was a military tribunal office, which looked more like a big birdcage. The office compound was guarded by soldiers armed with all sorts of weap-

ons. Inside the building there also were soldiers carrying G-3 automatic rifles studded with bayonets. They were surrounded by police officers armed with M-16 rifles. My friend, who was arrested with me, and I were closely watched by officers of a special branch of Military Intelligence and the NIB (National Intelligence Bureau). We were handcuffed together.

Through all this, I could never get an answer to my question: "Why military officials, surrounded and protected by armed soldiers in the heavily guarded office, could not solemnly hand down jail terms to us?" While we were in prison we went through all kinds of hardships and troubles, and we survived. Now I realized why the military officials were so nervous in giving us jail sentences,

despite the fact that they were heavily guarded by armed soldiers. Those who have integrity are feared by those who do not. Military officials tried to hide their fear by re-asserting their military strength again and again. Justice, however,

A prison warden or someone in charge of the prison hall usually comes to inspect us performing our regular sitting duties. He counts the number of inmates in our barracks. If he makes a mistake in counting or finds somebody missing, we are doomed to do the sitting ritual through the night.

we must have perseverance and courage. I believe she will attain power if she really means what she has said. Moreover, I like her 'soft but firm strategy' to fight against dictators. I remembered a magazine article by Dagon Taryar, a well-known Burmese poet and writer.

At the time I found his article in the magazine I was in barrack 4 of Tharrawaddy jail. The article was also

Today was an unforgettable day
in my life because
I was released from prison.
On this day I decided not to
shout 'poun-zan,'
the word I hated most.

read and much appreciated by those from barrack 5. The title was "Softness & Strength".

Another speech by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, "it stated that "if negotiations were possible between the whites and blacks, why not between Burmese people?" But I think Burma's politics are more subtle and more complicated. In South Africa, everyone can easily see what is white and what is black. In our case, we are the same color, but, we have been trying to define who is politically "white"

and who is not. It is because the differences cannot easily be seen. To know the truth, perhaps hundreds more people need to go to jail. Then they could clearly see.

All this time, driving in the car, I had forgotten to talk to my mother who was sitting in the front seat. She must have thought of me as a crazy because, less than an hour after I had been released, I was talking

about how more and more people should go into jail. When I looked at my mother's face she was fast asleep -- she must have not slept at all the night before.

I told my nephew to slow down. There had been an increase

in the number of car accidents on the highways during the past month. In fact, I met a dozen motorists who landed in jail because of reckless driving.

Motorists are not those of loose moral character or who are lacking responsibility, but they are usually not in harmony with prison authorities. Long-distance drivers have a lot of general knowledge because they constantly are moving from place to place in the country. As they travel they meet people from all walks of

he or any other judge, could not accept a bribe and acquit the motorist during a project time. If you have a relative working closely for the SLORC authorities, your case may often be dismissed, but if you get involved in a car accident during 'si-mann-chet' period, it is likely that you would be given at least one year hard labor even though you are willing to bribe the judges at the township or divisional levels. Besides, it takes a long time to file appeals for reducing your sentence -- you have to wait for at least six months. Therefore, when you get the release order, you would have spent nearly 300,000 Kyat and already been in prison for about a year.

Being in prison is quite costly too. When a new prisoner enters a jail he is greeted by the yelling, cursing and beating of warders or other prison employees. The new inmate soon becomes aware that some inmates have to be hospitalized because of these cruel beatings.

It is compulsory for a new inmate who is there on criminal charges to pay an entrance fee, placement fee, cleaning fee, warder fee and many others though you do not exactly know for what the 'fee' goes. In addition, if an inmate is unable to work or does not want to work at *ye-bet* camps (prison labor camps) he has to pay 3,000 Kyat monthly and

another 3,000 Kyat for light duties. Prices vary depending on the nature of the favor. To take daily showers you have to pay 1,000 Kyat per month and another 1,000 Kyat monthly for sufficient amounts of food. There are many other things inmates have to pay, in fact, you have to spend as much money as staying at an expensive hotel. Do not be shocked if you are continually approached for "donations." If a prison employee gets married or his sister-in-law dies, you are supposed to make some contribution. If toilets need repair or a prison barrack needs painting or some showers have to be fixed, inmates there for political reasons should be ready to make donations in cash.

If you are unable to pay or



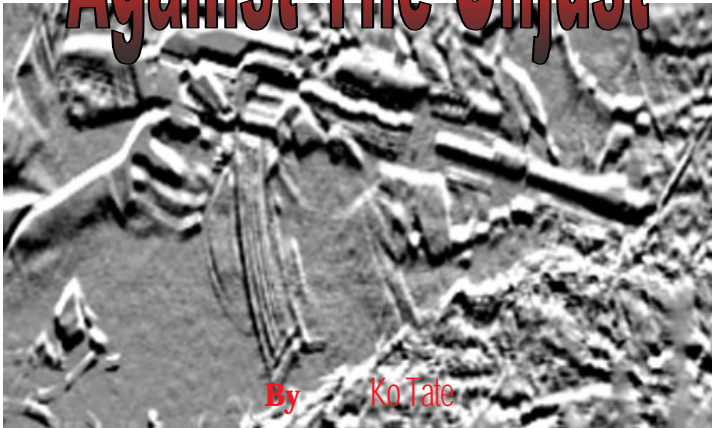
A man has the freedom to be alive, to create and to move according to his or her age and intelligence. It's the law of human nature, in other words it is called "just." If this idea of what is "just" is destroyed, it becomes "unjust."

Throughout the world, governments were founded to judge something fair or unfair and to protect the people from the unjust. Later, law and precedent appeared.

However, governments have different policies and concepts of good will. Therefore, each government rules people differently. Depending on the government, people experience poverty, wealth, harassment, racial discrimination and other abuses.

Because of this, the United Nations formed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for countries and people of every religion. Almost all countries accepted it. Our country also agreed and signed this declaration.

Let's Fight Against The Unjust



nals then began beating them harder than before. Finally everything was quiet.

We heard every event of that night. We became angry and sobbed while looking at each other in our room. We could guess their condition well. They were beaten all the way to prison and then, when they arrived, they were beaten for more than 4 hours. We felt sympathy for them.

The next morning, we approached them to talk and encourage them but they did not reply, as they were now very afraid of everything. They moved slowly and painfully, inch by inch, and talked very weakly.

We tried our best to help the 63 newcomers. The prison meals were never enough and always of poor quality so we collected dishes from our families for them. They voraciously devoured this first meal, as they had not eaten for days. Some had been without food for so long they were unable to eat. We also shared some medicine, which we had kept secretly. We cleaned their wounds and washed

their clothes. In response to our kindness, they began to trust us and explained the condition they experienced:

According to them, the *Tatmadaw* (armed forces), in 1991, seized some arms near the Htaw Pi and U Ni Suu villages in Pantanaw Township, Irrawaddy Division. The *Tatmadaw* then forcefully raided these villages using helicopters. Villagers, animals and houses were killed or destroyed. Moreover, the *Tatmadaw* arrested any ethnic Karen men in sight.

Over 200 Karen were shot dead in front of the other villagers. Some 500 Karen were arrested and tortured during interrogation that lasted over a month. Later, they were sent to Basseim and Henzada prisons. About 250 were sent to Insein prison, among them 63 were placed in our building.

They told us that, after their arrest, they did not receive any food for about one week. Their legs were locked in stocks and their hands were tied

The *Tatmadaw* then forcefully raided these villages using helicopters. Villagers, animals and houses were killed or destroyed. Moreover, the *Tatmadaw* arrested any ethnic Karen men in sight.

ever sickness they had.

Most of the 63 Karen, imprisoned beside our room, were not involved with the arms seized near their villages. Over one dozen of them were just 14 or 15. About ten were over 60 years old. The authorities beat them before jamming them into a truck bound for the prison where we were held.

They had no family visits as their family members were all killed or put in other prisons. Therefore, they had no contact with the outside community and their situation was hopeless. They felt uneasy and nervous for days. They seemed disheartened and some could not eat, they just cried. Family members (brothers, fathers and sons) were put in different rooms. The authorities didn't allow them to appeal the sentence and U Saw Tun, one of the prison officials, said the prisoners must be regarded as rebels. I felt very sorry for them.

This story is not an isolated incident and I remember when 20 Karen were imprisoned in 1983. These men are still in prison even though their prison periods have been completed. Moreover, there have been three amnesties to all prisoners during that period. Ten were with me when I was moved to Thayet

prison. Among these men, Saw Tin Myint reportedly passed away very recently on Aug 1, 2001 in Thayet. The 18-years of terrible prison conditions killed him.

Look at these events! How can we believe the current military regime when they say that they are emphasizing national reconciliation and the non-disintegration of national solidarity?

Some people were arrested for possessing guns. Later, all of the Karen villagers near that place were arrested, tortured or killed. Is this the building of national solidarity?

Are we going to just sit and watch this unjust treatment? We all have the responsibility of coming out of the dark into the light. We are forced to live in the places we are asked, work in the way we are ordered, no complaints - just accept everything. Not only the activists, but also the innocent people are forced to live under the total control of the military authorities. We need to fight against these kinds of human rights violations. As for me, I've already made up my mind to participate for freedom out of the darkness.

Ko Tate

We live in a knowledge-based era. Knowledge can help us to overcome obstacles and be successful in life. Yet knowledge is capable not only of changing a person's life, but also of transforming a country's system. One organization that knows this very well is the Burmese junta, who call themselves the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Because they realize how important knowledge is to an individual or a society, they have carried out a constant campaign to blind the eyes and deafen the ears of the Burmese people to keep themselves in power. The less the people know, the easier it is for the junta to rule and do whatever they want with the country. This is also why the regime restricts access to knowledge for dissidents. The fact that political prisoners are not allowed to read or write while in prison provides clear evidence of the junta's intentions.

While in prison, prisoners of conscience have almost no rights. They are forced to kill their time sitting or lying down in their tiny 8 x 8-foot cells, chatting with fellow inmates. They don't even have the right to talk with criminals or other political prisoners in other cells. Yet the most restricted activity for political prisoners is reading and writing, which is dangerous because it can

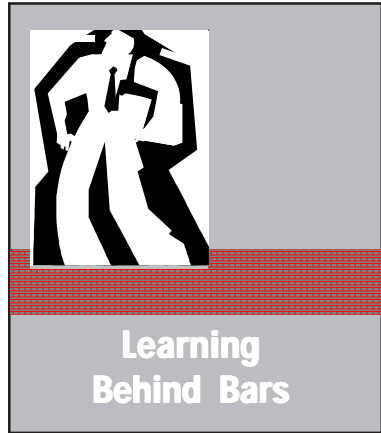
certainly increase knowledge. Thus, paper- whether blank or printed- and pens and pencils are totally illegal. If the authorities find such items on a political prisoner, he is shackled in solitary confinement for about three months, and forbidden to receive visitors or food parcels.

Like other political prisoners, we students were very anxious to study or read anything that would improve our knowledge, even though we were not allowed to continue our formal education while in prison. For my part, I had long been interested in the English language, and was eager to continue learning about it. However, when I was thrown in prison, I was not permitted to read or write. None of us had anything except a couple of shirts and a longyi each. However, when we wanted to communicate with political prisoners in other cells, we used a kind of leaf as paper and a small sharp stick as a pen. On these small leaves, we wrote some information-short political songs and so on. But we had to conceal them carefully, and as soon as we had read them, we had to destroy them, because any writing, whether on a leaf, a wall, the ground, a plastic sheet, or a piece of paper, was totally restricted. Though a blank leaf may seem harmless, one with writing on it could lead to bludgeons and shackles.

not have been possible without the help of some warders who sympathized with political prisoners. They knew we had committed no crime, and they enjoyed chatting with us, though in fact, they had no right to do so, as they were instructed rigidly not to communicate with political prisoners. Out of our casual chats, a friendship developed between us. After a while, they became aware of our hunger for reading material, and agreed to help us. Although we had to pay them to smuggle it into the prison, their understanding of our need seemed more important. I still remember the first warder who gave me a few pages printed in English. He was one of the lowest-ranked warders, and he liked chewing betel nut, which he used to carry wrapped in a torn piece of newspaper. The first piece of paper he gave me was from an article about glaciers, but it was incomplete-just a few paragraphs. It contained new words that were difficult to understand, so I had to ask the older prisoners who were good at English what the words and paragraphs meant.

Gradually, our cell became a jail library, with magazines and books, including Time, Newsweek, a dictionary and grammar books, concealed in our hollow.

Political prisoners were only



allowed out of their cells for a short time two or three times a day, to have a bath (about 30 minutes) and to dispose of excrement from the earthen pots we used as toilets (about 15 minutes). Whenever our cell was unlocked, I ran to other cells to ask what I didn't understand in the torn pages. Little by little, we managed to persuade some warders to smuggle books into the prison. This was not at all easy, as all warders were searched thoroughly at the prison gate for illegal materials such as drugs, money, paper, books, pens, pencils and so on. Some warders were sacked and others sentenced to up to seven years on account of smuggling books in for political prisoners, so we had to appreciate their help.

With the assistance of those warders, we obtained some books, including a dictionary. The big prob-

prisoners, so all Thai prisoners were transferred to the Central Jail. We had lost not only our books but also the places to hide them. However, our desire to study was still strong, so I tried to get hold of some books again. It took about a year to get some, and then we had to think about a new way to hide them, because the authorities already knew about the hollow.

A day that brought us ill luck arrived in mid-June 1997, before we had finished making a place to conceal the books. I had recently been transferred to a different cell in the same building. In my previous cell were five of my inmates. They were a 60-year-old monk, a 50-year-old National League for Democracy member, a leader of the Democratic Party for a New Society, a university student, and a young member of an ethnic group. On the morning of that day a special, thorough search of the whole prison was made, and books were discovered in my previous cell. After the search, the university student, named Ko Naing Win, was taken out, his head covered with a black hood and his hands handcuffed behind him. He was taken to the dog-cellblock in the Central Jail,

a special place for punishing prisoners. Minutes later, the others from that cell followed.

All of them, including the monk, were shackled and savagely interrogated about how they had got the books. Then Ko Naing Win was transferred to No. 2 cellblock, which was another building notorious for punishment. They were not given any food or water for two days, and for five days they were brutally tortured. After that, they were sent back to our prison, which was a good thing in a way, as most punished prisoners are not sent back to the same cells. However, those five prisoners, including the monk, suffered severe injuries to their ankles because of the rough shackles they were forced to wear. The scars on their legs would never vanish.

That is just one example of what it is like to try to get an education inside a Burmese prison. As long as the junta controls Burma, there will be prisoners of conscience. And as long as there is no right to read in prison, political prisoners will be bludgeoned and shackled.

Kyaw Zwa Moe

Restricted movement, the inability to make a living, offenses to personal dignity, and severe harassment for meeting and speaking freely: these are facts of life not only in prison. After my so-called release from prison I often felt that I, along with other former political prisoners in my country, was still behind bars.

IMPOSSIBLE EMPLOYMENT

After I was released from my first imprisonment¹ I discovered that my difficulties were not over. I got a part-time job at a photocopy shop for my survival. Soon Military Intelligence (MI) interrogated the shop owner. "Why did you employ him as your worker? Don't you know that he was a politician?"

For the ordinary businessman, these are very dangerous words, so although they did not want to fire me, they did. I lost my job and my income and of course it became very difficult to continue my studies at Rangoon Arts and Science University, where I was majoring in Burmese Literature.

Trying to find another job, I applied at some business companies. The application forms asked, "Have you been involved in politics?" And as soon as I wrote the words "former political prisoner," I was denied the job. Soon I realized I would not find a job with a company, so I decided to become a private teacher.

But this kind of employment displeased MI and they did everything they could to prevent me from teaching students. They visited me regularly at my house and told me bluntly, "We dislike your being a teacher because you are one of the student leaders from the 1988 student uprising." They suggested that I write an article in the state newspaper entitled 'When I was in prison, they treated me very well.' They also suggested that I go abroad to find work. They wanted me to get out of Burma.

To the first statement, I replied



Spirit for Survival

students were taken to the police station and questioned. Had I discussed politics with them and organized them against the government? The students had never had such an experience and grew frightened. Furthermore, their parents were questioned. Why did you put your child in a class with a politician? But the students continued to attend my classes.

On this day my father was summoned too. He was instructed to control me better and told he was responsible for me.

Why did my family and I have to deal with this now? I had completed my sentence; and even that was punishment for an action that was not a crime. But political activists are a threat to the ruling government and in order to protect themselves, they have to make us miserable. It had been my own choice to become a politician - not my family's. I was sorry that they also suffered because of me.

Many of my colleagues have had the same experiences. Many of us, living in Thailand now, left our homes because we did not want to put our families in danger. First we were prisoners in our own country, and now we are trapped outside of it.

After these threats, some time passed peacefully with no more trouble from the MI. But one day the problems started again. I was attending my friend's birthday party at a small restaurant.² Everyone was in a happy mood and we were singing "Happy Birthday song." However, we lost that happiness 15 minutes later as we received some bad news.

Everyone was upset and nervous. And then they looked at me with sympathy and asked me many questions. What will you do? Do you want to run away?



Everyone was in the mood of happiness.

We were singing

"Happy Birthday song."

However, we lost that happiness

15 minutes later

as we received some bad news.

and offered me incentives. The chief officer claimed, "We want you to deal with us. We need you for the sake of the people."

"I really want to deal with the army if the military officers can keep their word," I replied. "Otherwise I do not."

When he heard that, he was very angry and asked if I meant they lied. "You would know your self when you looked at your past," I exclaimed. I did not want to deal with any organizations or person that did not keep their word. I was told that I would stay there until another order came out from the higher-ranking officer.

In a small room, two soldiers guarded me with guns and full equipment. We had a conversation. One of them was a high school student. He knew that I was a teacher and held high respect for me. He called me "Saya" (teacher). He told me that he had failed English every year and humbly requested that I teach him. At these words, I suddenly sympathized with these young soldiers. He apologized to me, "I did not want to guard you, but as a soldier I must follow orders. I do not understand why you, a teacher, were taken."

I told him, "I understand you. One day we will work together for our country. For now you should

act according to your duties. I will not be angry if you are ordered to beat me." I did not want any trouble for him. I went to sleep.

At six a.m. officers awoke me with an offer to go home under an arrangement that was basically house arrest. I was to report my activities every evening to the Headmaster of my quarter. They wanted to control my movements even though I was not a prisoner and had not done anything wrong. So I went home, but I did not do what they ordered.

Two days later was an important historical date in Burma. On July 7, 1962 the then government led by General Ne Win had destroyed the student union building in Rangoon. On this day in 1994, the local government was nervous about what I might do. I stayed in my house all day long. I wanted to show the Headmaster what I was doing so I invited him to my house. For a while, we talked about other things. Soon, an entire platoon of soldiers with guns surrounded my street. At first I looked out without saying anything. Then I joked to the soldiers, "Your duty is just to watch me. No need to roam around the streets." Then I said very loudly so that many others could hear me, "Just like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, I am under house arrest!" It was the first time many of my neighbors had seen

view. The MI wanted me to work with them and join their side. I also wanted them to be on the side of the people. We could only work together if we met in the middle.

He asked me to become an informer for them. I said that I would agree to that if he would meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and release Min Ko Naing and other student political prisoners. But he ignored my suggestion and so I ignored his request. Our discussion finished unsuccessfully. I left to continue my work as a private tutor.

A few days later soldiers, the police, and MI raided my house without any legal papers, and after taking me to their secret place they presented me with three poems.⁵ During the 1988 uprising I was the editor of O-way magazine, published by All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU). I still kept some of our writing in my house. I did not write the poems they found, but I said that I had. If I had denied that they were mine, they might arrest my father instead. Now they were going to arrest me.

The next day was to be the final match of the World Cup. Brazil and Italy were playing and I felt eager to watch it. I asked the officers to wait until after the match to arrest me. But they denied me this

request and I was kept at the police station. In the morning we had yet another private "discussion." They repeated the same threats and persuasions as I had heard during my meeting in the pagoda. But this time they added something. They asked me, "How does your family plan to pay back its financial debt?" If I agreed to work for them they would pay my family's debt.

I faced a choice between two paths. I could go to prison, or I could betray the struggle. As much as I cared about my parents and sisters and brother, I knew it would be wrong to trade their financial security for a dishonest life. I gave them my final answer: "I will go to prison." As former political prisoners, we know very well how terrible it is to be in prison. We are even more afraid than others of being thrown back in jail. But our other option, to work as informers for the MI, means betraying the people who have died while fighting for democracy and human rights.

That afternoon the policemen received instructions from their officer and I was placed in police custody, charged under Section 5J⁶ and accused of poisoning people's minds with three poems.

I wish I could remember the exact words to these poems, but that

I faced a choice between two paths.
I could go to prison, or I could betray
the struggle. As much as I cared about my
parents and sisters and brother,
I knew it would be wrong to trade
their financial security for
a dishonest life.

prison for four and a half years. In the same way the MI continuously questioned me when I was in prison, they also frequently asked my opinion after I was released. For example, after the military regime forced citizens to attend a mass rally to denounce the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 1999, they asked me what I thought about it. "It is unfair," I said. "Why don't you let the NLD have a chance?"

"And what do you think of the current government?"

"It is a coup d'etat government," I told them simply.

BROKEN HEARTS

Many former political prisoners find themselves without prospects for a happy future because they had to say goodbye to lovers, spouses, and families, when they were put behind bars.

After my high school graduation (in 1983), I found a girlfriend. We intended to get married one day. But our relationship began to see problems in 1988. I was involved in politics, and she wanted me to stop and work in business instead, in order to provide a brighter future for us. I tried to gain her understanding by explaining why I was involved in politics, but the next year she asked me to make a decision; if I chose to continue my political activities then she would have to choose another life, apart from me. I could not give her a decision. I could only respond, "Choose for yourself."

For nearly three months we lost contact because I was so busy with my work for the union, and when I was arrested in March 1990, she did not hear about it. By the time my family found out where I was and managed to

"I don't know exactly, maybe three years.

Maybe five or seven years."

"That is too long!"

She was not an activist and she could not understand and bear the great difficulties of waiting for so long.

consequences from the continuing harassment after we are released. Many years later, if we hear a sound outside our house at night, we will not get back to sleep. We feel a sort of shock, and we fear that we are going to be arrested again.

Former political prisoners must deal with threats to themselves and their families, restrictions on their movement, insults to their dignity, censorship of their self-expression in writing, speech, and association, and sacrifices in their personal lives. It is a challenge to find the bright side of these dark experiences, but we must keep looking. We cannot forget our friends who are still in prison; we are together in the "prison without bars" of our country.

1- The date was January 21, 1993. It was my 28th birthday.

2- The date was July 5, 1994. It was the birthday of Ko Thet Win Aung, who is now in Kale Prison (Sagaing Division) serving a sentence of sixty years, the longest sentence for any student activist in Burma.

3- The name of the ruling government at that time was "State Law and Order Restoration Council," or SLORC.

4- British Broadcasting Corporation, Democratic Voice of Burma, Radio Free Asia, and Voice of America are radio stations that broadcast news about Burma from abroad.

5- The date was July 17, 1994.

6- Section 5J is the 1950 Emergency Act allowing a sentence of monetary fines and seven years imprisonment, at local officers' discretion.

Bo Kyi

About the author

Htain Linn was involved in the pro-democracy uprising in 1988. After the nation wide demonstration he joined the National League for Democracy party (NLD). He was detained by Military Intelligence in 1997 for his political activities. In 1998 he was detained again for a period of nearly one year.

In 2001 he left Burma for security reasons. Now he is working as a member for the AAPP and also writes articles for exile publications in Thailand.

Friendship is based on mutual love and kindness but our relationship was very different. I knew him well but he didn't know me at all. We regarded him as our intimate friend and, even more than that, our closest colleague but he was out of our reach.

We imagined his portrait with knowledge acquired through stories we heard. Some expressed images of his student life. Some demonstrated his character. Gradually his image became alive in our senses and thoughts. However, we still waited for a chance to meet this unseen man and to hear his brave words.

He was respected because of his goodness. One of his attributes was his strong spirit.

"Right and wrong always go together. We can clearly see those who stand on the side of right and those who stand on the side of wrong. But no matter what happens, you must know what is right. Sometimes there are two right sides contending with each other. At that time, on which side do you stand? If you choose one, you should stand firmly where you are. I dislike sitting on the fence."

I thought back on my friend's words: As a man, one has an ability to divine what is right and wrong, choose what to believe and take a stand. You must try to be strong and accomplish

what you stand for and believe in. My friend had this ability. He suffered miserably for his beliefs but he never gave up.

He firmly held his political beliefs until he died. He was one of the Rangoon Organizing Committee members of the National League for Democracy (NLD). When the 1990 election was held in Burma, he ran as a Member of Parliament for his native constituency. At that time, his opposition was his older brother, who ran for the National Unity Party (NUP), which was regarded as an opposition party to the NLD. This proved that he stood for what he believed in as traditionally the younger brother must respect the elder.

wwwwww

"U Tin Maung Win was dead. Today his corpse was viewed."¹

These words! This bad news was the news we never wanted to hear. Although we heard the words, we didn't want to believe them because he was in prison for only a short time. However, whether we wanted to believe it or not, we had to inquire about it. Then we went to a place we didn't want to go; Kyantaw Cemetery where 'men should not be well-attended.'

We sat down under the *Kou*

When we were under imperialism,
we could see vividly who was
the imperialist or the pro-imperialist.
Now people are being treated
very brutally
by their own flesh and blood.
Though the junta can break the body,
they cannot break a patriotic spirit.



***Oh. Ah Pho... the histories be-
came rude..***

Thakhin Aung San ³..

***Oh, Ah-pha.. the state has been
stained with blood...***

***Oh.. dare to accomplish.. The
corpses are in the street..)2***

Solo:

***(Oh, our brothers..
flowing blood in the street are not
dry yet..***

***Don't hesitate.. like our
heroes.. who passed away in the
democratic combat..***

***We will revolt distinctly..)2
Our patriotic martyrs...***

That defiant sound drifted through Kyantaw cemetery. Carrying unseen grief, the melody touched our hearts and gave us the strength to stoically endure our suffering. This was not only the funeral of a martyr but

also a miserable example of military dictatorship. Whether we believed it or not; our hero was dead.

When we were under imperialism, we could see vividly who was the imperialist or the pro-imperialist. Now people are being treated very brutally by their own flesh and blood. Though the junta can break the body, they cannot break a patriotic spirit. Look! While military intelligence personnel watched and placed many obstacles in our path, the anger of the students and youth exploded in the form of revolutionary song while we carried the coffin.

Carrying the memorial wreath, we marched to the crematorium before the coffin. We put the coffin on our shoulders instead of using the cart. Soon the flame would eat our hero's corpse. I thought even though he might disappear physically, his spirit and soul would float with the

PRISON WALLS AFFECT
THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE
T O O

Young Birds

Outs

By **Aung San Suu Kyi**

mere 15 minutes at a time.

Two years is a long time in the life of a child. It is long enough to forget a parent who has vanished from sight. It is long enough for boys and girls to grow up into young adolescents. It is long enough to turn a care-free youngster into a troubled human being. Fifteen minutes once a fortnight is not enough to reverse the effects on a child of the sudden absence of one of the two people to whom it has habitually looked for protection and guidance. Nor is it enough to bridge the gap created by a long separation.

A political prisoner failed to recognize in the teen-ager who came to see him on the first family visit after more than two years in detention the young son he had left behind. It was a situation that was familiar to me. When I saw my younger son again for the first time after a separation of two years and seven months he had changed from a round faced not-quite-

12-years-old into a rather stylish "cool" teen-ager. If I had met him in the street I would not have known him for my little son. Political prisoners have to speak to their families through a double barrier of iron grating and wire netting so that no physical contact is possible. The children of one political prisoner would make small holes in the netting and push their fingers through to touch their father. When the holes got visibly large the jail authorities had them patched up with thin sheets of tin. The children would start all over again trying to bore a hole through to their father: it is not the kind of activity one would wish for any child.

I was not the only woman political detainee in Burma: there have been -- and their still remain -- a number of other women imprisoned for their political beliefs. Some of these women had young children who suddenly found themselves in

In Burma those who are held to endanger state security can be arrested under a section of law that allows detention without trials for a maximum period of three years.

And prisoners, who have not been tried, are not entitled to visits from their families.



**Homo Homini Award was honoured to
Min Ko Naing
for 2000 from the Czech Republic.**

Homo



**This certificate is from
Trinity College of United States
for Ma Thida Htway.**

**This certificate is from
Trinity College of United States
for U Ye Tint.**

Note