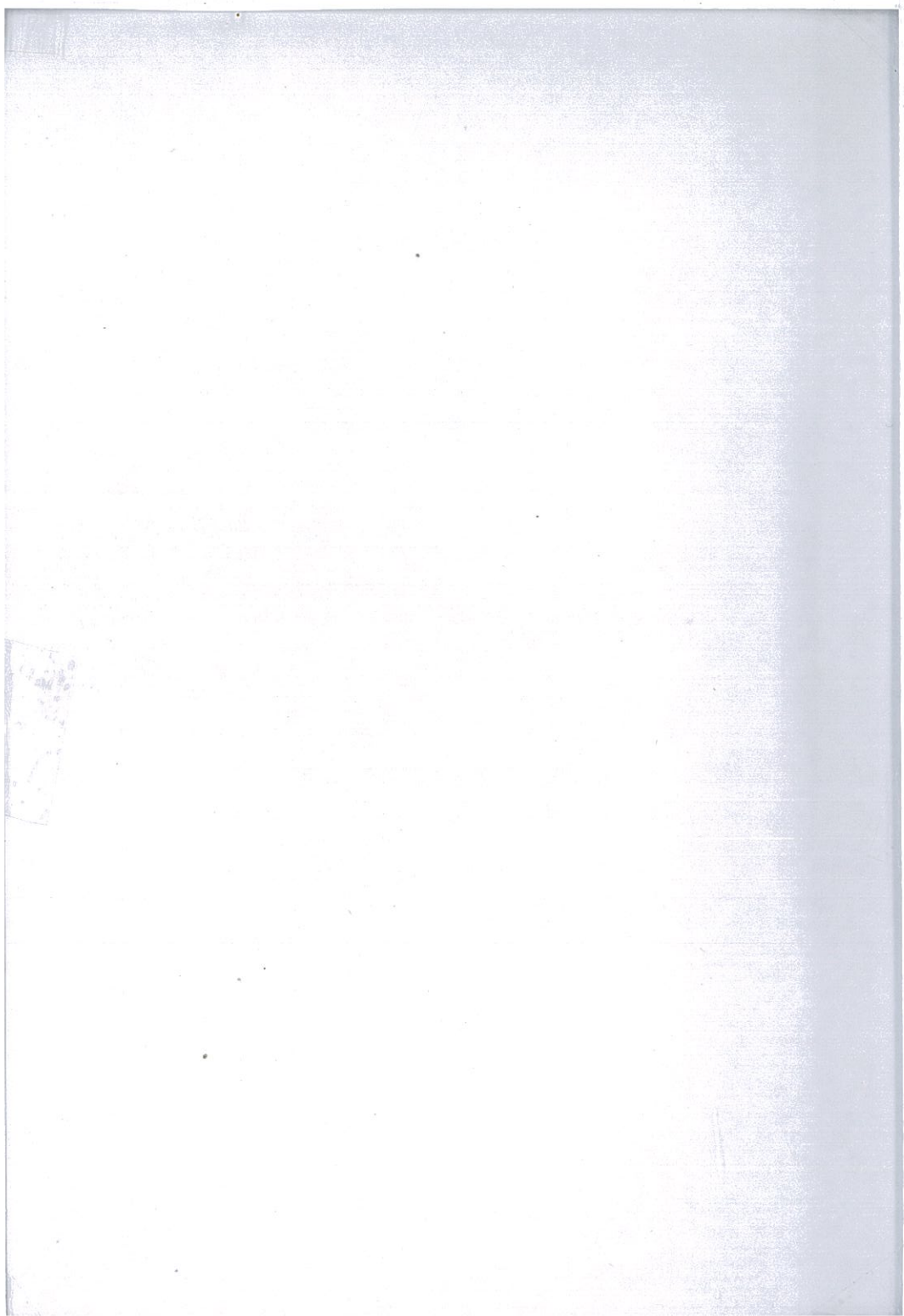


SPIRIT FOR SURVIVAL



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
(Burma)



SPIRIT FOR SURVIVAL



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
(Burma)

Publishing & Distribution

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners(Burma)

(AAPP)

September 2001

Copy

1000

Lay out design by

IPO Art group

cover design by

Maung Taik

Address

AAPP

P.O Box 93

Mae Sot, 63110

Tak Province

THAILAND

Email: aapp@cscms.com

Tel/fax 66-1-28 78 751

Acknowledgements

We, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP), would first like to give sincere thanks to the contributors to this book for providing their personal experiences for publication.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) for its kind support of funding which made the publication of "Spirit for Survival" possible.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to all those friends and colleagues who assisted in translating, lay out and design for these stories. In particular, photographers, Zarny, Bo Kyi, Htain Linn, Maung Myint Thein, Min Kyaw Khaing and members of the Independent Pen Organization, as well as Tony Broadmoor, Danny O'Brien and Faye Lone who edited the publication.

CONTENTS

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



68

**THE UNDERGROUND
REVOLUTION**

(Khin Maung Soe)

72

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

(Zin Linn)

82

**Tin Maung Oo
A ROSE IN DECEMBER '74**

(Maung Maung Taik)

88

**INSEIN PRISON:
Could Mandela Survive Here?**

(Moe Aye)

94

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

(Thet Hmu)

106

**LET'S FIGHT AGAINST
THE UNJUST**

(Ko Tate)

111

LEARNING BEHIND BARS

(Kyaw Zwa Moe)

117

PRISON WITHOUT BARS

(Bo Kyi)

130

RECORD OF THE RED ROSE

(Htain Linn)

136

YOUNG BIRDS OUTSIDE CAGES

(Aung San Suu Kyi)

140

Appendix



Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

3. To secure fundamental human rights for political prisoners, and to provide them with basic necessities such as food and medicine.
4. To protect the political prisoners upon their release from prison from harassment and intimidation by the military regime, including when they are looking for employment, continuing their studies, associating with friends and colleagues, and especially to protect them from persecution if their political activities are resumed.
5. To aid in the reconstruction of the ex-political prisoners' lives, including both their mental and physical well-being.

Steps to improve prison conditions:

1. Physical and mental torture in all its forms should cease to exist.
2. Prisoners should not be subjected to lengthy periods of solitary confinement. A maximum period for solitary confinement should be imposed and enforced.
3. Sanitation projects should be implemented inside prisons to improve the general health situation.
4. Adequate and nutritious food and sufficient clothing should be provided to all prisoners.
5. Access to adequate medical treatment should be available to all prisoners.
6. Political prisoners should not be transferred to remote prisons so that their families cannot visit on a regular basis.
7. Prisoners should be immediately released when their sentence is finished. This should be strictly enforced.
8. Access to a fair and public trial should be available.
9. Prisoners should have access to reading and writing materials and the opportunity to use them.

What you can do:

- Make a donation to support AAPP's work.
- Put pressure on companies that are dealing with the military junta in your respective country to cut ties with Burma.
- Boycott tourism to Burma and products made in Burma imported to your region.
- Tell friends and family about torture victims and the situation in Burma and ask them to support the work of Amnesty International and AAPP.
- Demand the release of all political prisoners.
- Condemn arbitrary arrest and all forms of torture.



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.

Untouched- not quite
I can count the things
that have touched me

One: fists
At the beginning
fierce mad fists
beating beating

till I remember
screaming
don't touch me
please don't touch me

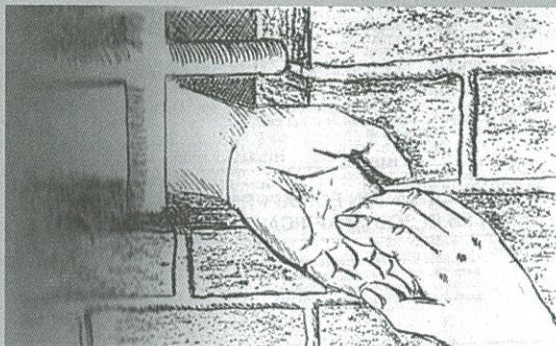
Two:paws
The first four years of paws
every day
patting paws, searching
-arms up, shoes off
legs apart-

prodding paws,systematic
heavy, indifferent
probing away
all privacy.

I don't want fists and paws
I want
to want to be touched
again
and to touch
I want to feel alive
again
I want to say
when I get out
Here I am
please touch me.

Hugh Lewin

From
Counselling Torture Survivors



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 worldwide audience. She is now being held under house arrest in her lakeside house in Rangoon.

BURMA'S GOV'T LEAPS OVER LEGAL PROCESS

Misrule of Law

By Aung San Suu Kyi

As I understand it, a kangaroo court is so called because it is a burlesque performance where the process of the law takes heart-stopping leaps and bounds. Out of curiosity, I looked up the entry on kangaroos in the Encyclopedia Britannica to see how far these marsupial mammals can clear in a leap. Apparently the record is 13.5 meters. This is far superior to the Olympics long-jump record. It is no surprise then that the erratic course of justice in a kangaroo court is outside the bounds of normal human conduct.

I have written about the challenges that political dissidents in Burma have to face. Everybody committed to taking an active part in the endeavor to return the country to democracy has to be prepared to go to prison at any time. It usually happens in the middle of the night, appropriately, as there can be few deeds more akin to darkness than that of depriving innocent people of a normal, healthy life. The ones most vulnerable to arrest are members of the NLD.



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

prisoners have to make strenuous inquiries to find out where they are, with what "crime" they would be charged and when and where the trials would take place. Usually the trials of political prisoners are conducted in a special courthouse within the jail precincts.

Last month, a number of political prisoners were tried in Insein Jail. When the NLD heard that U Win Htein and some others were going to be produced at court on a certain day, a lawyer was sent to defend them. The Special Branch officer at the jail questioned by the lawyer said he did not know anything about a trial. But the trial took place while the lawyer was waiting at the gate and continued after he left in the afternoon. The next week, a number of lawyers again went to Insein Jail, accompanied by the families of the prisoners, on the day they had heard the trial was to continue. This time they managed to get into the prison courthouse. However, they were only allowed to cross-examine four of the 24 witnesses for the prosecution.

The next morning, the lawyers and the families of the prisoners arrived in Insein Jail at 9 o'clock, as they had heard sentence would be passed that day. The area around the jail entrance was full of security personnel and all the shops along the

road were shut. The lawyers were refused entry. They were told the sentence would only be passed at the end of the month and were asked to leave. However, as the magistrate concerned with the case had been seen at the Insein Township Magistrate's Court the lawyers were convinced the trial was scheduled to proceed within a matter of hours and continued to wait outside the jail.

The magistrate eventually arrived and entered the prison precincts at around 2 o'clock and came out again after about 40 minutes. The lawyers followed him to the Insein Township Court to ask what kind of sentence had been passed. The magistrate, very nervous and surrounded by security personnel, would only say that an application should be made to copy the records of the court proceedings. Some days later the government media announced that U Win Htein and others had been given seven-year prison sentences each. The sight of kangaroos bounding away across an open prairie can sometimes be rather beautiful. The spectacle of the process of law bounding away from accepted norms of justice is very ugly at all times.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Letter from Burma (No.42)

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.

Torture : The deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of psysical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or in order of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession or for any other reason.

- The Tokyo Declaration on Torture, October 1975

What is Torture?

By Bo Kyi

One of the greatest obstacles to assisting victims of torture and ending this abhorrent practice is public ignorance about the nature of the problem. Few people really understand what torture is. Since a greater awareness is essential for the prevention of future torture, I would like to explain what torture is, as well as its aims, methods and effects, drawing in particular upon the experiences of torture victims in Burma.

The Tokyo declaration on torture, cited above, 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. 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.

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

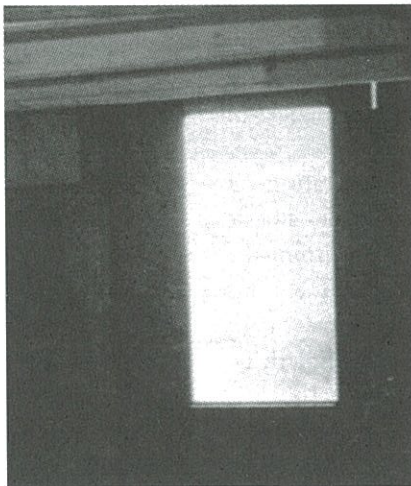
Concerning the aims of torture, however, it mentions only the immediate reasons for inflicting torture and not the underlying purpose, which is to effectively destroy the soul of a human being.

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



military regime, various physical torture methods are being used, including systematic beatings (aimed at inflicting permanent injury), unsystematic beatings (using rifle butts, truncheons, etc.), electric torture (applying electrodes to sensitive parts of the body, such as the gums, ears, fingertips, and sexual organs) and "moe dewa", or water torture (drops of water fall onto the victim's head until, after a number of hours, they feel like a pounding hammer). Another common practice is burning victims with cigarettes.

In the case of unsystematic beating, permanent damage may occur, even if that was not the intention. Thura Soe, a former political prisoner who was released in 1999, described being kicked and beaten by a group of men while being held at an interrogation center. The beatings started even before he was asked any questions. Both of his ears were hit during this in discriminate beating, leaving his hearing permanently damaged. Later, his right leg,

which had not healed from a previous injury, was repeatedly jumped on.

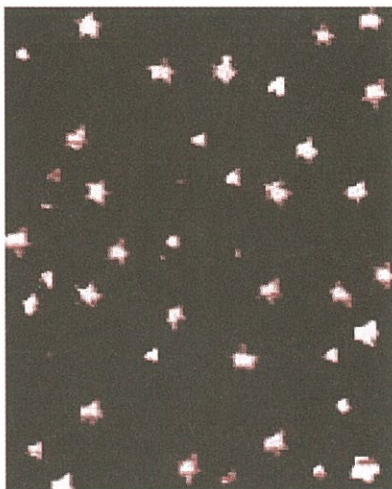
Moe Aye, another former Burmese student political prisoner, described his experience of systematic torture in his book, *Ten Years On*:

"Sit down, MI ordered, 'and stretch out your legs."

"Then one of my legs was pulled up, and I felt terrified. Both of my legs were placed on a piece of hard wood, and I then felt something like another piece of wood being place on top and I heard the sounds of iron chains. It was extremely painful and I cried out loud."

After being brutally tortured, the tissue damage and structural and functional consequences are the same as after assaults, accidents and sports injuries. In other cases, victims suspended by their wrists and with their arms above their heads, a common posture during interrogation by MI agents, complain of long-term joint pain, and some have difficulty standing or sitting for long periods of time.

The physical forms



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

der,
up

inally, on
ucceeded

hological
n closely
e difficult
l not dare
of having
d as it is
guilt and
hen they

fer from
ong after
re depre-
problem,
becomes
victim to

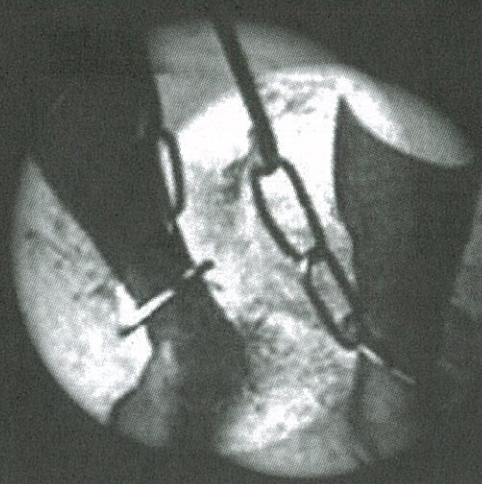
can help
ture of
ll as the
ners still
t's think
victims.

Kyi

2000

**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**

Aung San Suu ky



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.

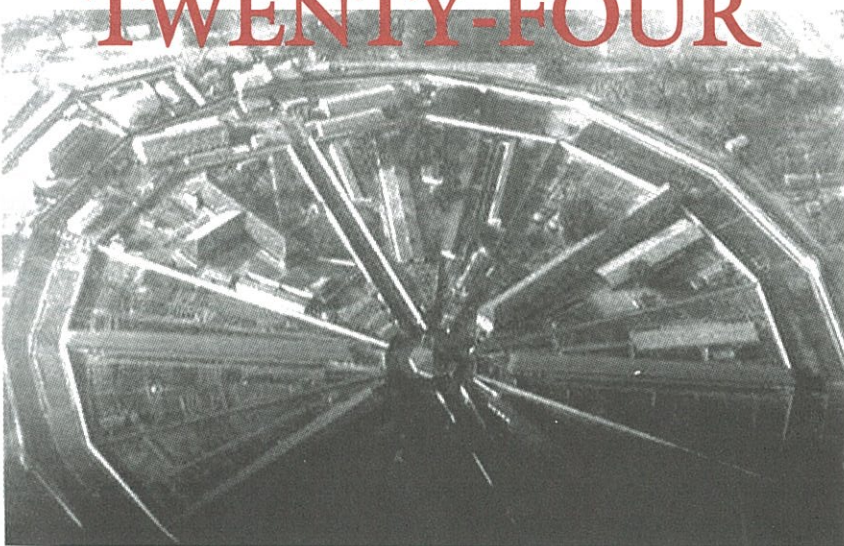
In 1991, he was arrested because of his connections with the exiled government, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), and the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and Sentenced to 7 years imprisonment in the notorious Insein Prison. In December 1997 he was released. He was given 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.

Freedom of Press Movement
in Insein Prison
(1992 - 1996)

**THE UNKNOWN
STORY OF THE
TWENTY-FOUR**



By ZIN LINN

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'

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.

was going to be held in January of
the following year. Some of the
prisoners of conscience welcomed
the National Convention but many
strongly opposed it. So we all decided
to run the risk of getting more
detailed information on this confer-
ence.

Everybody agreed we should
persuade the wardens to accommo-
date our needs. In short, at the start
of the National Convention (9th
January 1993), we received the Mirror
Daily Newspaper with the help of a
warden.

At that time, there were over
1000 political prisoners in the
notorious Insein Jail and over 500 of
them were prisoners of conscience.

There are six cellblocks in
the cell compound of the prison.
No.1 cellblock consists of 14 cells
or rooms. No.2 consists of 60 cells.
No.3 has 14 cells. No.4 (long) has 18
cells and 4 (short) has 12 cells. No.5
is made up of 22 cells and No. 6 has
10 cells. So, there are 150 cells
altogether. Each cell measures 8.5' x

11.5'.

There is also a special cell-
compound and a dog-cell compound.
Each comprises 10 cells. Special cell-
block is very special. Every cell is 12'
x12' in area and contains a bathroom
with a toilet. However, each cell has
two iron-doors covered with iron-
grilles.

There are also some cottages
for VIPs, such as ex-generals and
ministers. The special cell-compound
also houses the main interrogation
bureau of the Military Intelligence
service (MI). There, prisoners of
conscience are brutally tortured by
MI personnel. Most of the political
prisoners suffer inhumane treatment
and persecution within this special
cell-compound.

We initiated discussions so
that everyone, as well as every party,
could assist each other in getting
organized for the future struggle. We
believed that unity alone would
safeguard and secure our aim for the
restoration of democracy. That is
why we knew that we shouldn't fail

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

the democracy movement inside Burma-despite being behind the walls of Insein Prison. This was achieved, in the most part, by the MIC & HPPC and their success in overcoming the news and information blackout in the notorious Insein Jail. If we didn't overcome this blackout, most of the political prisoners might have become depressed and lost sight of their political destination. So, the journalistic activity of the MIC & HPPC was an essential service for our comrades and the democratic cause.

Each sub-committee had done well in its respective sector. We were now able to put forward our political attitude of opposing the fake National Convention and show our support for the initiation of dialogue between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the junta.

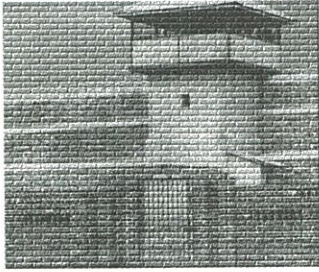
All of our comrades were able to thoroughly study the proceedings of the fake National Convention with the assistance of the MIC. We wrote our opinion or commentaries on plastic sheets and exchanged them with each other. At last we reached common ground. We all agreed that the National Convention was indeed a fake and 'just for show' because out of the 702 delegates only 99 were elected members of parliament. Besides, some were from ceasefire groups suspected of being involved in drug trafficking.

The worst thing was the junta itself had written the draft constitution. There were six major objectives in the draft. The sixth objective said that 25 % of the parliament's seats must be filled by military representatives, chosen by the chief of staff. That would mean the whole nation accepted the junta's coup as legitimate. So we, prisoners of conscience, made a decision to notify the NLD delegates of our belief that they should walk out on the sham that was the national convention. Eventually we composed a consensus paper requesting the NLD to refuse to take part in the farcical convention. We smuggled out the consensus paper and a petition of nearly 200 signatures. We heard later that one of the outside NLD members submitted the paper to the NLD chairman.

We could encourage each other to surmount the hardship and tortures of Insein Prison with the help of the JAC. We managed to achieve some success in defying the prison-authorities' oppression. The CPPPR took on this role of defying the authorities' unjust orders. Every prisoner of conscience will remember the committee's historic endeavors forever.

The MAC even managed to smuggle medicines and disposable

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.

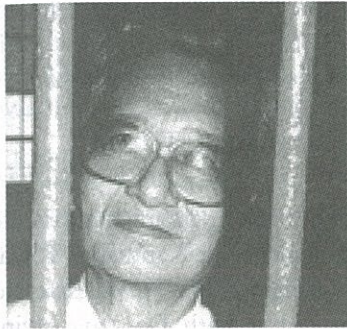
The 24 prisoners of conscience deserve a genuine honor. The valiant 24 achieved the unthinkable for a genuine democratic cause and freedom of expression in the most notorious of Burmese prisons. Their names deserve to be inscribed in an historical record book as an example to others.

The world today is actively calling for Globalization and moving

rapidly into an Information Technology Era. Yet the Burma military dictators are trying to pull the Burmese people backwards. They are still trying in vain to close the eyes and ears of the people. They are enemies of education and wisdom - and their own people. They think by using a palm-leaf they can easily protect themselves against a thunderbolt. What nonsense! Nobody can afford harnessing history to run backwards. None of these supermen can halt the IT Revolution. We are convinced that the junta will be shocked at the great power of the Internet society.

Prisoners of conscience who received additional imprisonments for their involvement in the freedom of press movement are as follows:

U Win Tin



U Win Tin, 72, is a prominent journalist and a founding leader of the NLD. He is also a famous writer, editor and critic. He was arrested on July 4, 1989, during a comprehensive crackdown on the NLD and other opposition parties. He has been sentenced three times. He was originally sentenced to 3 years and since then has received additional sentences of 10 years and 7 years. His total imprisonment will be 20 years with hard labour.

Born on March 12, 1930, U Win Tin received a B.A. degree in English Literature, Modern History and Political Science from the University of Rangoon. In 1953 he became assistant editor of the Burma Translation Society. From 1954 to 1957 he was a consultant editor of Djambartan Publishing Co. (Netherlands). He then became the executive editor of the Mirror Daily in Rangoon and held this position from 1957 to 1969. In 1969 he took on the role of chief editor at the Hantharwaddy Daily in Mandalay until 1978. In 1988 uprising he was vice chairman of the Writers' Association.

U Win Tin was the leading activist in the cell-compound news & information movement. While in prison he has suffered from heart attacks, spondylitis, hernia and also sight and dental problems. Although the junta

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

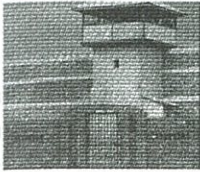
Kyaw Min Yu, (aka) Jimmy, is a member of the DPNS Central Executive Committee and was arrested in 1989. At that time he was only

19 years old. He received 20 years imprisonment.

Kyaw Min Yu was the most active member of the MIC and was responsible for smuggling the 8-band radios into the cells. He wrote many articles about the 1988 students strike, which appeared in the periodicals published in Insein. He was sentenced to 7 years for code 5(J) and 5 years for code 6, totaling 12 years.

He is now serving his 32 year sentence in the Tharawaddy Prison.

Myat Tun



Myat Tun, 36, is an NLD Executive Committee member of Kamaryut Township in Rangoon division. He was a 3rd year university student, majoring in Burmese, when charged in connection with the Democratic Alliance of Burma and sentenced to 8 years.

He was responsible for listening to the radio, with earphones, at night. He shared this task with Jimmy and they both took notes. They sent the notes to Myo Myint Nyein who was in room 17 of 4 (long) cellblock.

Myat Tun wrote poems and literary reviews in the Yangon University Annual Magazine. He also wrote satirical short-plays in the *Tidal Wave* and other issues, which were produced in Insein, and received 7 years imprisonment for this work.

He is now in Myingyan Prison.

Thet Min Aung



Thet Min Aung, 35, was arrested in early 1991 for possessing arms and was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. He is a member of the ABSDF.

Thet Min Aung was an MIC executive member and successfully managed to smuggle papers and writing materials into prison. His duty was to deliver the news bulletins and hand-written magazines to the inmates in cellblock 3. He actively participated in the news and information movement in prison. Moreover, he was chosen as the ABSDF's representative in the CPPPR. Due to his participation in this committee, he was charged with panel code 6 and sentenced to an additional 5 years imprisonment.

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

magazine 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

years and 7 years, totaling 12 years. He is now held in Tharawaddy Prison and is suffering from arthritis.

Htay Win Aung (aka) Pyone Cho

Htay Win Aung was a Geology major student. He was a well-known leader of Rangoon Division Students' Union and was subsequently sentenced to 7 years in prison.



He is a good artist and is gifted at embroidery. He illustrated many of the hand-written magazines. His paintings were very attractive and for these decorations he was sentenced to a further 7 years imprisonment.

He is now in Tharawaddy Prison.

His younger brother, Thet Win Aung, is also in Kale Prison serving 60 years for his involvement in student's strikes in 1998.

Yin Htway

Yin Htway, 36, is a Central Executive Committee member of the DPNS and was arrested in early 1990, accused of defiance against SLORC. He was sentenced to 20

years in prison. At the time, he was a 3rd year History student.

Yin Htway was one of the editorial staff of the *New Blood Wave* magazine, which was brought out in commemoration of Phone Maw, the first fallen student in the 1988 uprising. He also wrote political dialogues in the hand-written issues. He received a further 7 years imprisonment for his work on the *New Blood Wave*.

He is now in Tharawaddy Prison.

Hla Than

Hla Than, 33, is a member of ABSDF. He lived in Tharkeyta Township and was a college student. He was arrested in 1990 for possessing arms and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

As a member of the MIC of the 4 (short) cellblock, Hla Than wrote his memoirs in the hand-written magazines. The court handed down an additional 7 years imprisonment for this work. He is now detained at Tharawaddy Prison.

Aung Myo Tint

Aung Myo Tint, 33, was a student activist arrested for possessing arms and received 20 years imprisonment.

He was an editorial staff

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.

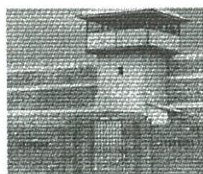
He was responsible for keeping and lending Time, Newsweek and Readers' digest as well as other books. He was sentenced to an additional 7 years imprisonment.

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

December movement and received 10 years imprisonment.

He was responsible for bringing out the *Diamond Jubilee National Day Annual Magazine*. This annual magazine



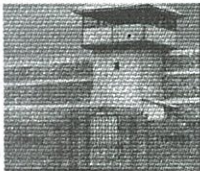
was very grand with an embroidered cover of a dancing peacock. There were over 100 articles with colorful illustrations. For this work he was seriously tortured and sentenced to a further 7 years imprisonment.

There were over 100 articles with colorful illustrations. For this work he was seriously tortured and sentenced to a further 7 years imprisonment.

Zaw Min

Zaw Min, 32, was a 4th year Geography major student and a member of ABFSU when he was arrested, accused of having connections with the ABSDF Underground Unit. He was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment.

He cooperated with Phy Min Thein in bringing out the *Diamond Jubilee Magazine*. He also worked with Myo Myint Nyein to produce a weekly news bulletin. He wrote poems and drew sketches of the 1988 events. He received a further 7 years



imprisonment. He is now at Thayet Prison.

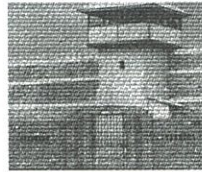
imprisonment.

He is now at Thayet Prison.

Soe Htet Khine

Soe Htet Khine, 30, is a member of ABSDF and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

He was an active youth in the 4(long) cell-block and his duty was to deliver news-bulletins and other periodicals. He wrote poems



in the handwritten issues. He was also part of the assistance staff on the *Diamond Jubilee National Day Annual Magazine* (1995). For this reason, he received another 7 years imprisonment.

He is now serving in Tharawaddy Prison.

He is now serving in Tharawaddy Prison.

Aung Kyaw Oo

Aung Kyaw Oo, 30, was a 1st year History student in Workers' College and a member of ABSFU.

Charged in connection with the 208th Battalion of ABSDF, he was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment by No.2 military court in Insein Jail.

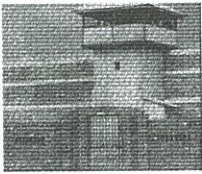
He wrote memoirs of the students strike in 1988. He also composed some poems in the *Diamond Magazine*. One of his poems was titled

"*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-

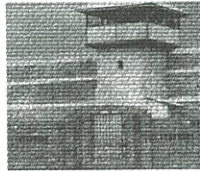
der the watchful eye of the jail authorities, at night times, and was industrious and vigilant. He was sentenced to an additional 7 years and transferred to Tharawaddy Prison in September 1996.

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

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.

to another 7 years for his work in Insein Prison. He was sent to Myitkyina Prison in Kachin State in 1996 where his family cannot visit him because of the long journey.

He remains in Myitkyina Prison.

Myo Myint Nyein

Myo Myint Nyein, 50, was an editor when he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment due to his publication "*What is Occurring?*", a satirical poem-booklet.



Myo Myint Nyein successfully sent a prisoner's shirt, signed by prisoners of conscience, to the UNHRC annual meeting in 1993. He also took responsibility for the editing of the *Diamond Jubilee National Day magazine* (1995). Moreover he and Kyi Pe Kyaw managed to deliver the weekly news-bulletin regularly.

He smuggled the report on the Human Rights Abuses in Prisons to the UN Special Rapporteur Mr Yozo Yokota. He was sentenced to additional 7 years for his activities. Then he was sent to Tharawaddy Prison in 1997.

He remains in Tharawaddy Prison and now suffers from gastritis, migraines, neurotic behaviour and hypertension.

ZIN LINN.

About the author

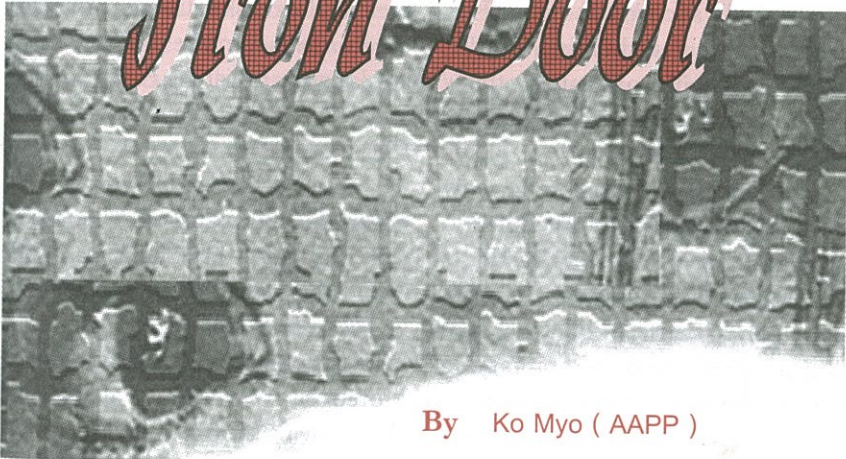
Ko Myo was born in 1976. When the 1988 popular demonstration happened in Burma, he was 12 years old. However, despite his youth, he was able to participate by shouting slogans. He survived this period, even though many people were shot to death. Two years after the uprising in 1990, he was detained for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

*"Close the door! It's windy!
Take me home!"*

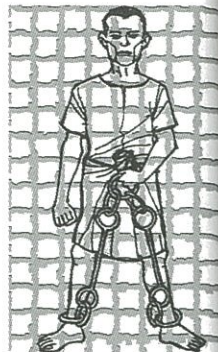
These are not the words of a normal person.
They are the words of an activist in the Myingyan prison
in middle Burma. They are the words of a man suffering from
mental illness because of the terrible conditions.

Behind the *Iron Door*



By Ko Myo (AAPP)

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

them.
ons v
towns
famili
receiv
suppe
the au
sharin
the pe
eratio
sake o
us. Th
Mying
More
our b
could
to ba
every
paper
we w
in iro
more
were
daily



"It's not bow enough!"
"Your dressing style is not tidy,
redress right now!" "Polish again on the
iron bars, it's need some brightness!"
"Cleaning the cells is not perfect!"
Catching the flies was one of the methods of
psychological torture.

them. All activists are placed in prisons very far away from their hometowns. As most political prisoners' families are poor, this means they receive very rare visits and hardly any support from their families.

We were brutally beaten if the authorities found us talking and sharing things. They wanted to destroy the political way of life such as cooperation and working together for the sake of others. They wanted to divide us. That is why political prisoners in Myingyan prison bathed one at a time. Moreover, the rest of us had to sit with our backs to our cell doors so that we couldn't see the other prisoners going to bathe. They searched our cells every day. If they found a piece of paper or even a rice seed in our cells, we were beaten and our legs were put in iron shackles. When we asked for more food, we were beaten. These were the terrible conditions of our daily life.

Don't do anything without

approval. Stay at the place you are ordered to. In prison, we activists were regarded as animals under the control of the authorities. This is one of the reasons the activists suffer from mental illness after being in prison for years. Whether intentionally or not, it affects our psychological condition. An example is when we sat in the poun-zan position, they shouted, "It's not low enough!" "Your dressing style is not tidy, fix it right now!" "Polish the iron bars again, it needs some brightness!" "Clean the cells they are not perfect!"

Like San Tun, another activist who became mentally ill in Myingyan prison was Aung Naing. He was accused of blowing up the Tanyin petrol refinery, outside the capital Rangoon. He went insane, after experiencing the tortures of Myingyan prison. I recall a regretful event involving him and another prisoner. One day, one of the activists in a nearby cell threw a snack bag

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)



World history has shown that people with strong spirit, unity, courage and discipline can bring down authoritarian governments.

Min Ko Naing

Chairperson of ABFSU

(All Burma Federation of Student Unions)

Currently in Prison

It is the 21st Century and all kinds of dictatorship are defeated in the current political trend. In this world, bad will become good and low will become high. We cannot ignore this factor and regress to the past.

Democracy will be better for our future generations. That is why we must have democracy.



U Tun Myint

One of the NLD leaders

Currently in Prison

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.

A STAR FALLS DOWN BEFORE SUNRISE

By Naing Kyaw



An afternoon in October 1992,
at the hall of Kyantaw cemetery

Ma Khin Myo Myat (aka) Cherry
24 years old
Final year Zoology

I saw you lying down quietly
amid the hundreds of students.
Are you taking a rest forever
because, even though
you were so very young,
you experienced such
a bitter life?
Or what else?

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**

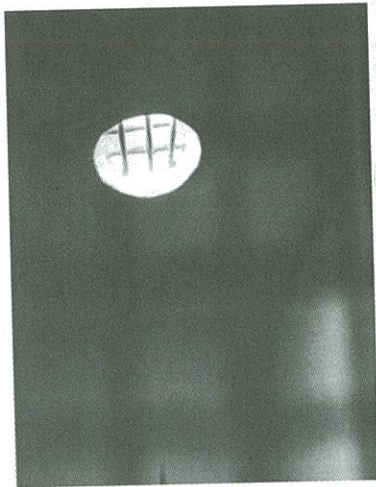
Those friends who took the wreath marched to the crematorium but their steps were unwilling. But you could not have known that you were being taken there as you lay silently in the coffin. I felt really sad for you Cherry and choked with emotion.

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



impriso
1989.

that tin
experier
about yo
the stor
see tha
while yo
for the
mother
and nur
have th
any inc
to cove
Meanw
were st
give yo
help so

1911
1912
1913
1914
1915
1916
1917
1918
1919
1920
1921
1922
1923
1924
1925
1926
1927
1928
1929
1930
1931
1932
1933
1934
1935
1936
1937
1938
1939
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945
1946
1947
1948
1949
1950
1951
1952
1953
1954
1955
1956
1957
1958
1959
1960
1961
1962
1963
1964
1965
1966
1967
1968
1969
1970
1971
1972
1973
1974
1975
1976
1977
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
1983
1984
1985
1986
1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026
2027
2028
2029
2030
2031
2032
2033
2034
2035
2036
2037
2038
2039
2040
2041
2042
2043
2044
2045
2046
2047
2048
2049
2050
2051
2052
2053
2054
2055
2056
2057
2058
2059
2060
2061
2062
2063
2064
2065
2066
2067
2068
2069
2070
2071
2072
2073
2074
2075
2076
2077
2078
2079
2080
2081
2082
2083
2084
2085
2086
2087
2088
2089
2090
2091
2092
2093
2094
2095
2096
2097
2098
2099
2100

and imprisonment with hard labor in 1989.

There was nothing to do in that tiny cell so we exchanged our experiences. Therefore I learned a lot about your family in that time. From the stories your father told, I could see that your family was suffering while your breadwinner was in prison for the sake of the people. Your mother was occupied with housework and nursing the children so she didn't have the business knowledge to raise any income. She could not find a way to cover all of the family's expenses. Meanwhile, you and your brother were still students and you could not give your hands to your mother to help solve your family's economic

crisis because you were also involved in the political struggle.

Your mother knew that political prisoners are not provided with sufficient water (for bathing and drinking), food, medical treatment or even space for sleep. Therefore, political prisoners absolutely depend on the support of their families for the preservation of their lives. Some political prisoners have died from a lack of essential assistance such as medicine and nutritious food.

Therefore, she regularly visited her husband. Even though they faced a lot of misery, she sold the gold rings she was keeping for their retirement in order to provide for your father. Her visits to prison saved not only your father but also us.

I really appreciated, honored and respected her like my "aunt."

The regime intentionally tries to break the spirit of political prisoners by sending them to remote prisons far away from their families so that they suffer psychological misery and lack of support from the family.

Your father was moved from Insein to Tharawaddy prison at the end of November 1991. I was also transferred, but to Thayet prison. Soon after, on December

Your mother knew that political prisoners are not provided with sufficient water (for bathing and drinking), food, medical treatment or even space for sleep. Therefore, political prisoners absolutely depend on the support of their families for the preservation of their lives.

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.

No matter what happened to us, your name was one of the few and you were freed. We rejoiced at your release, as we knew you could return to help your family.

After I was released from prison in September 1992, we met unexpectedly in the downtown area of Rangoon. We sat together at the cold drink shop for two hours. I saw tears in your eyes as you explained your situation.

You were struggling to survive from day to day and all the while the MI had you under their surveillance. Your younger brother was out of school and worked to support the family. However, no matter how hard you tried to find a job, it was impossible because the MI would threaten any future employees. Once you were about to be appointed at a company but, unfortunately, the MI discovered this and warned the director of the company that you were an ex-political prisoner.

So you lost again. However, the worst thing was your mother was suffering from a mental illness. It seemed the trials she had faced throughout her life had finally taken their toll. Sometimes she spoke nonsense to herself and she could not divine what was good or bad. I could imagine how terrible this made

you feel.

Your spirit was noble. You always relied upon yourself. Therefore when we offered you some money to start a small business, you refused it and said that you wanted to keep trying until the last minute.

It was a surprise for us to see your mother. She ordered you not to be involved in politics anymore and when we visited you, she showed her dissatisfaction in her manner. In the meantime, MI would often visit you and ask many questions. Sometimes they said malicious things to destroy your dignity, such as:

How do you manage to visit your father?

Have you fallen in love with someone?

How much do you pay to the rent this house?

Can we find a job for you?

Do you want to join with us?

And so on.

While you were telling me this, I saw you were trying hard not to cry. Cherry, I never thought that this meeting between you and I would be the last.

Two weeks later----

The news was shocking and painful--I did not want to



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

EXILE FROM RANGOON
BURMESE ACADEMIC
AND
DISSIDENT

FLED BRUTAL MILITARY RULE OF HOMELAND

By **DOUG BLACKBURN**
STAFF WRITER FOR TIMES UNION

Aye Chan, believing he was a marked man, intended to flee Burma on May 19, 1990. The history professor had announced the plan to his wife and young daughter at dinner the previous day, telling them it was no longer safe for him to remain in Rangoon.

He would cross the border into Thailand and send for his family or return in triumph if the pro-democracy movement took hold. Either way, he hoped to see them again soon.

Then there was a knock at his door. It was 8:45, just 15 minutes before the 9 p.m. curfew went into

effect. Two students were outside, seeking refuge. Aye Chan, sympathetic to their cause, could not say no. But he hesitated.

"Were you followed?" he asked the students.

"No," they answered. "We don't think so."

He allowed them to come in, offering them a place to stay for what he thought would be his last night with his family for some time.

Two hours later, there was another knock at Aye Chan's door. The students had in fact been followed. Aye Chan opened the

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

than 47 million today is impoverished. Life expectancy for males is 53 years, for females' 56 years. There is, according to the World Almanac. One physician for every 3,554 people: One telephone for every 317. The country was granted less-developed status by the United Nations in 1987.

At the time of Aye Chan's arrest in 1990, Burma was on the radar of the western world. The general ruling the country at the time, Ne Win, made the astonishing admission that his nation was coming apart at the seams and announced that there would be open elections.

Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of a long-dead national hero, led the opposition pro-democracy party to a landslide victory that the military government refused to acknowledge. Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, and in 1991. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her eloquent, nonviolent campaign for democracy in Burma.

Aye Chan, now 51, does not remember when Burma was a democracy. During the military coup d'etat in 1962, Aye Chan's father was fired from his cabinet post and sequestered in a detention center for several weeks.

"He wasn't sorry he lost his job. I remember when he came home, the first thing he said was, "We

have lost democracy.' It was what he was most sorry about. He gave me a good example."

Pro-democracy

When Aye Chan enrolled at Rangoon University in 1968, there were two groups of student activists, pro-communist and pro-democracy. He sided with the pro-democracy faction, circulating leaflets in an underground movement during the college's 50th anniversary celebration.

A government crackdown ensued and many of the upperclassmen fled to Thailand. Aye Chan, a sophomore was arrested.

"I denied all the accusations. Maybe they believed me, because I was released three weeks later and expelled for one year," he recalls. "They made me sign a pledge to not speak out against the government."

"I was not very active after that. I was worried about staying in school and graduating. I wanted to be a professor. I wanted to study abroad."

Aye Chan became a teacher, although he was frustrated by the military's influence even in the halls of academia. There was pressure from the government to not teach Darwin's theory of evolution.

When he was offered a scholarship to do research in Japan

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

know s
can't pu
educati
help th

disside:
Simon
eral Ar
year vi
which
rent se
search
to stay
return:

and su
Prize
had co
impris
registe
vincec
them.
oner
descri
ficial
Septer
prom
the ru
mocr:

Si

the p
Burm
two E

know students and faculty in Burma can't pursue a serious course in higher education at this time, and we want to help them".

Aye Chan is the first Burmese dissident to have joined the faculty at Simon's Rock. He arrived at the Liberal Arts College in 1998 with a three-year visiting professor appointment, which expires at the end of the current school year. He is beginning to search for a new position and intends to stay in the United States until Burma returns to democracy.

He remains an avid admirer and supporter of Suu Kyi, the Nobel Prize winner, but Aye Chan has not had contact with her since he was imprisoned. He has sent numerous registered letters to her, but is convinced she has not received any of them. Suu Kyi remains a virtual prisoner in Burma, her status usually described in news reports as "unofficial house arrest." A news report in September said she was free again and promising to continue challenging the ruling regime and working for democracy.

Supporting the movement

Aye Chan says he supports the pro-democracy movement in Burma in every way he can. Currently, two Burmese natives are staying with

the Chans while attending Berkshire County Community College. Aye Chan's daughter attends the public high school in Great Barrington, while his wife is struggling to master English in her new country.

The history professor has shared the saga of his imprisonment with his Asian studies students at Simon's Rock, but this is the first time he has granted a media interview to talk about his travails. He is a serious man with an intensity that five years in solitary confinement could not quell.

It may not be surprising, given what he has been forced to endure, that he remains embittered. "In this case I am not a very good Buddhist," he acknowledges, "I am supposed to get wisdom and I am supposed to forgive those who tortured me."

"Well, I'm sorry," he says. "I can neither forgive nor forget what I suffered in the prison and the interrogation camps. My standpoint may be different than a young student leader. I don't want to retaliate. But I cannot forgive or forget."

DOUG BLACKBURN
STAFF WRITER
FROM TIMES UNION (U.S. NEWSPAPER)
October 8, 2000

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.



Few people outside the country of Burma can understand the images and memories that are rolled into the simple expression '10-D.'

For many it signifies their beliefs, sacrifices made, risks taken as well as the lost lives of their compatriots who died fighting for a cause they deeply believed in.

10-D is a concept rich in symbolism and at the same time difficult to express in words.

Those who truly understand the meaning of it will never forget it, especially those who have languished inside the walls of Burma's prisons.

By Kyaw Zwa Moe

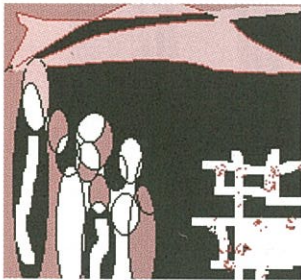
After the Burmese military crushed the 1988 calls for democracy by massacring thousands of peaceful demonstrators throughout Burma, peaceful demonstrations and political rallies of any sort ceased to exist in Burma and universities around the country have also been closed. However, one request of the 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.

upon
stud
endi

flame.

Decem
student
demon
to sho
Laurea
show t
junta,
and D
Soon,
them a
the D
The st
the ju
the el
San S
release
their p
onstra
up and
of th
chanti
injusti
desire

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.



flame.

During the morning of December 10, 1991 some university students lit a fire during a peaceful demonstration at Rangoon University to show their support for Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and to show their disapproval of the ruling junta, now renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Soon, hundreds of students joined them and were actively taking part in the December 10 demonstration. The students were demanding that the junta step down and recognize the election results, free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and release all students being detained for their participation in previous demonstrations. The students marched up and down the famous main avenue of the campus, Adipati Avenue, chanting slogans and denouncing the injustices of their government. The desire to demonstrate appeared to be

contagious as students the following day at the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) instigated similar movements on their campus and students at Mandalay University attempted the same.

Before these demonstrations even began the students realized the magnitude of resistance they would face for attempting to reinvigorate the democracy movement. The military regime's reputation for handling situations of this nature was one of violence and hate. The regime's attitude is to retain power at all costs whether that means the use of simple intimidation or the outright slaughtering of innocent people. But the students were convinced that it was their civil duty to candidly express their will and desire to live in a fair and free society as well as to bring to light the atrocities committed by their government. Although the students were too

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.



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

insid
den
mov
a stu
Sinc
ated
ber
they
grou

forr
tion
tota
for l
Any
sess
pap
to b
in i
mo:
cert
was
San
pol
onl

If any paper was found concerning politics another seven years was to be added to their sentence. Sanctioned education of any sort for political prisoners in Burma is not only against the law but looked at as subversive and unnecessary. This may surprise some, but for Burma's 2,000 political prisoners this is a part of everyday life.



inside the walls of prison, the warden and guards dictated their every move and any remaining memories of a student's life came to a bitter end. Since these students were incarcerated for participating in the December 10 movement, once in prison they became known as the '10-D' group.

At this point not only was a formal education out of the question but any reading and writing was totally prohibited and punishment for breaking these rules was extreme. Any political prisoner found in possession of the tiniest piece of blank paper or any written document was to be housed in solitary confinement in iron-shackles for two-to-three months. If any paper was found concerning politics another seven years was to be added to their sentence. Sanctioned education of any sort for political prisoners in Burma is not only against the law but looked at as

subversive and unnecessary. This may surprise some, but for Burma's 2,000 political prisoners this is a part of everyday life.

These individuals, after facing such arduous and inescapable obstacles, were robbed of the youthful opportunities they so deserved. Although many have been released they still battle incurable diseases and mental illnesses that were contracted during their long-term imprisonment. Even now, almost ten years after the 10-D demonstration some students of the 10-D group still languish in the notorious gulags of Burma despite completing their sentences. Regardless of their immutable pasts their fight continues as they are still struggling to bring democracy, freedom and justice to the country they love, totally heedless of their own personal freedom.

Kyaw Zwa Moe

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.

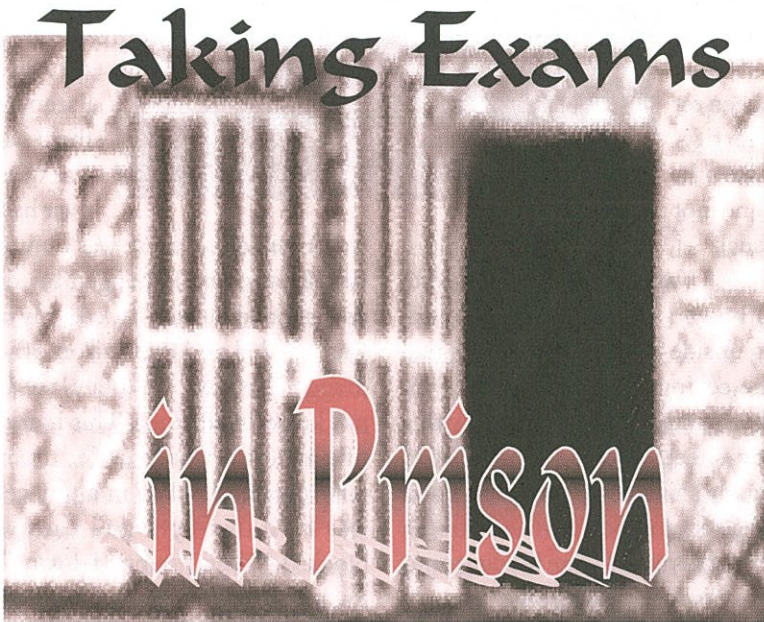
He was brutally beaten and transferred to Thayet prison for his role in the strike.

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.

Don't think that there are no exams after
an activist is imprisoned in Burma.

There are some exams and
I was reminded of my school days with these hard exams.
First it was the sound of the iron door opening and a voice,
"Gyauk jet, gyauk jet." And then,
shouting of my name followed and I was asked to change into the
white-colored prison uniform.
"Come out for questioning," was next.

Taking Exams in Prison



By Sai Win Kyaw (AAPP)

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.

a bulb. There was one table and two chairs facing each other in the middle of the room. On the table were papers, a pen and a folder. What are they going to do? The prison staff behind me asked me to sit down and I did. I said "Thank you" in my mind for being allowed to sit. Of course, I had not been allowed to sit in the previous interrogations. I had to stand for many hours while replying to their questions and submitting to their torture. I thought this time would be different from the previous one as I was allowed to sit down very early.

A

moment after I sat, a man in a sport shirt and with smart hair came in. He sat across from me. His manner was quite cool. His body was tough, and he seemed healthy. He looked at me. His eyes were sharp and bright. He started talking and asked what I needed, about my health and living conditions, etc. "How are you?" he asked. Why did he ask me that question? Although my physical health was not too bad, my mental health seemed not to be okay. I was kept in

a tiny cell for 23 and a half hours a day. I was allowed out for less than 30 minutes. It really hurt me as I was kept in that cell almost the whole day. It was not only one day, but it was for years. In the 8'x10' small cell, I had my meal, walked, slept and answered nature's calls. Who would be okay in that sort of place? There were two exit doors; one was iron and the other was wooden. It gave me much stress.

"No rights to listen the radio, read or write . 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.

I explained a little bit about it. "You all are unjust. I have been imprisoned under unconfirmed and non-

sense charges. I didn't do anything wrong but brutally I have been put in a tiny cell." He smiled at me like a winner in battle. He told me to be patient; there were many prisoners and a small amount of rooms, and security was important. He also said that the current conditions were only temporary, and they were going to improve the conditions. "When will the temporary conditions be finished?" I asked. The answer was that it depended on the outside political

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



exercise
questio
litical b
to dest
give it

idea th
activitie
workec
rights,
stop th
to buil
the na

olved
to buy
fore, I
the ex

diffic
though
last tv
blank
office:
that I
He sm



Prisoners of conscience who lost their lives during the 1990s represent a broad range of the Burmese political spectrum and even include a Buddhist monk.

Aung San Suu Kyi

exercise in brainwashing. The first questions regarded my opinion, political beliefs. The last two were meant to destroy my political dignity and give it up to them.

It seemed that they had no idea that I had participated in political activities because of my beliefs. I had worked for democracy and human rights, which we still do not have, to stop the decades-long civil war and to build a real federal union for all the nationalities to live in peace.

No one asked me to get involved in politics. But, they wanted to buy me with opportunities. Therefore, I already knew the results of the exam and how to take the exam.

The first questions were not difficult. I wrote down what I thought rather completely. For the last two questions, I just left them blank and gave it back to the MI officer. He checked it and realized that I had not filled it out completely. He smiled and said, "Don't be fool-

ish." He added, "Can't you change your opinion?" My answer was "No, that's my real opinion." His face suddenly became tough, and he called the two staff in from outside the room. "Take care of him and send him back!" On the way to my cell, as usual, I was hooded. I remembered and saw the faces of my three children and my wife. Everybody has some family ties or other attachments, but we have to look at the rest of our people. In the hood, I guessed that I was not going to pass the exam. I walked confidently although I already knew the results. However, I felt satisfied as I had showed my opinions to the military regime.

In my childhood I had cried when I failed the annual exams. Now, I had ruined the one exam that could affect my future, even though I knew how to pass.

Sai Win Kyaw (AAPP)

Aug 29, 2001

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.

Cell #5, Room #7, Insein Prison November, 1975

It was a cold winter night and the moon was shining outside.

But the moonlight couldn't enter our room
because of the brick wall in front of our cell.

The floor was damp from the dew.

There were twenty-two rooms in cell #5. Each room in the cell was
9'x 7' and 13' high. A door with iron bars was the only way
we got air and dim light. There were three in the room at a time.

All of us were weak after four months of poor food.

We ate only spoiled broken rice, rotten fish paste with
worms and bad smelling soup. We didn't get any sunlight at all.

Our skin had changed to a faint yellow color.

Myo Thant coughed with a cold.

Tun Aung Gyaw was getting thinner and thinner each day.

I was tired all the time. We had to do something.

I broke the silence at last:

"We have to eat those underground fighters!"

THE UNDERGROUND

REVOLUTION

By Khin Maung Soe

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.

secret bargain with the night shift warden. According to the agreement we had to hand him the rats every morning before his duty ended, and he would bring back a dish of fried rat in the evening.

So, from that night onwards, our "*Underground Revolution*" started. We cleaned a glazed earthen basin that was given to us for use as the toilet bowl. We made a string six feet long and found a stick of about six inches. We tied the string to the bottom of the stick and used it to prop up one side of the basin, near the rats' entrance. We threw some rice under the basin and pretended as if we had fallen asleep while holding the other end of string. It was almost midnight when our first prey appeared. As the rat crawled under the basin, I pulled the string and it fell over him. He tried hard to escape by pushing around from inside. I ran to the basin and pressed with my foot while Tun Aung tried to catch his tail. Then he pulled the rat from under the basin, little by little, until half of his body appeared. I was pressing the basin the whole time. Then Tun Aung broke the rats back by pulling up hard on his tail. We heard the sound of the spinal cord break, "Jook!"

We got five that night and

we had our "*Grand Dinner*" the next day. We released the news to the others and word of our revolution spread quickly. Believe me, there are not enough words to describe the taste of rat meat. It was fried with red pepper and ginger. The ribs were the best - very crispy. To be honest, it was the most delicious meat I have eaten in my life.

To the best of my knowledge, we successfully captured more than three hundred "*Underground Fighters*" in Insein prison. In this way, the rats supported us. We got our energy and courage back again. I might not be here today if I hadn't eaten those rats during my prison term. Some of our inmates died of malnutrition. Thank you, Mr. Rat.

Twenty-five years have passed, but I still remember them, especially when I have barbecue ribs. So the next time you eat barbecue ribs, please remember this: someone is chewing on a rat's ribs in a part of this wonderful world. Then, you'll be sympathetic to the political prisoners in Burma.

"Oh, how I can still smell those ribs with red pepper and ginger."

Khin Maung Soe

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



peopl
muni
gener
of pr
ity of
lifting
on th
they
solve
posit
More
inter

easil
milit

tary
of ci
for
avai
cun
80 p
in t
NLJ
a le
ern
stea
drea
me
hav
imp
or
for
pe

It is regrettable that some people from the international community still consider the Burmese generals as the only caucus capable of preserving the peace and prosperity of the nation. They also advocate lifting sanctions currently imposed on the generals' junta. The reason they give is that sanctions cannot solve the deadlock between the opposition and the military dictators. Moreover, sanctions hurt the citizens' interests but not the generals'.

But why do these people easily forget the misdeeds of the military regime.

In the last decade the military authorities have launched a series of crackdowns on the National League for Democracy (NLD) using the available means in crooked and cunning ways. The NLD won over 80 percent of the parliamentary seats in the May 1990 elections. Yet the NLD has not been allowed to form a legal government. Instead hundreds of its members have been imprisoned or detained for their peaceful

political activities, and tens of thousands have been forced to resign from the League. Anyone who refuses to abandon the NLD, or other opposition parties, faces a series of social and economic blockades, such as being denied access to the government's health care centres and hospitals. If someone from an NLD member's family passes away, the military agents threaten the public to stay away from the funeral. So, it is the junta that imposes sanctions, without sympathy, on NLD members and pro-NLD civilians.

In addition, the NLD's offices throughout the country were shut down by force to silence any opposition and keep the population in a state of fear. Freedom of expression and assembly has been completely denied by the junta until now. The year 2000 brought even more repression of peaceful political opposition. For the time being, NLD leader Daw

Aung San Suu Kyi and many other NLD MPs and members have been held under arrest due to their peaceful ac-

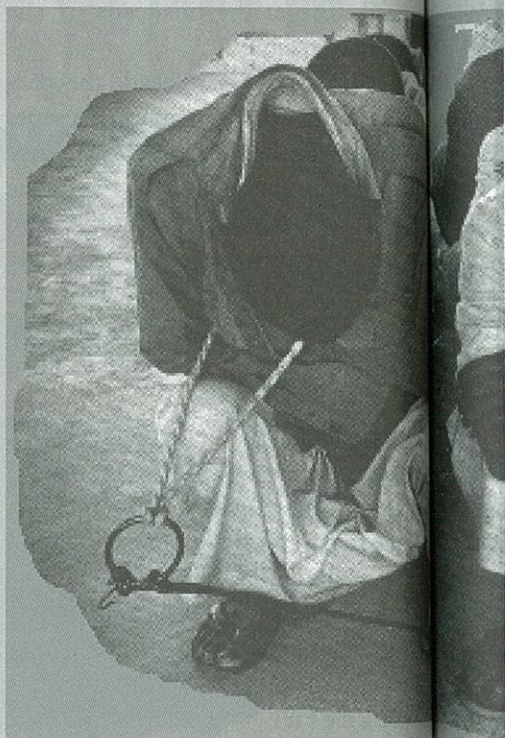


tivities.

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



The Biggest Forced-Labor Camp in the World

more prisoners to use as unskilled laborers on the highway projects and quarries.

In Burmese language these prisoners are called *ye-bets*. Due to hard labor, inhumane treatment, persecution, lack of basic needs and medical care the death toll of *ye-bets* is terribly high. The junior prison-officer told me that secret prison-reports to the interior minister stated "Between 1972 and 1982 the average death toll of *ye-bets* was as many as 20,000."

In 1991, I was accused of

having connections with the NCGUB and was sentenced by Military Court No.2 to serve 7 years imprisonment. I was taken to cell-block 4 (short) in Insein Prison along with other prisoners of conscience.

We, the political prisoners, had some knowledge of the other ordinary prisoners who arrived constantly each day. We received confidential information from the wardens who sympathized with our situation. The criminal prisoners, who were assigned to perform cleaning works in the cell-compound, also told us first-hand, their experiences as *ye-bets*. We gathered information routinely. We exchanged this data with our fellow political prisoners. We assumed it was our duty to count the prisoners that came in and also those that went out to the labor-intensive camps, on a daily basis. Most of us, the prisoners of conscience, had spent over four years in the notorious Insein Prison and had become familiar with prison practice. Some of us were good at analytical appraisal. Learning facts from reliable people, we were able to make a good estimate on the flow of new prisoners.

There were about 1200 to 1500 new prisoners coming into Insein Prison every day. At the end of the each day, the prison authorities had to create an exact prisoners' list.



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



work. Some are arrested on weekends while in their own homes, having committed no crime. The only mistake they have made is to not go along with the followers or informers of the MI.

The MI accuses the detainees of breaking criminal code 54 or 13 (d). Code 54 allows the arrest of a person under suspicion of committing a crime. Code 13(d) allows the detention of a person who stays or hides in the darkness of night. Due to a long period of martial law most people are afraid to go outside at nighttime. The truth is, under these laws, people who are reluctant to support the regime have to face such a fate.

There is an example of one U Ba Tu, who lived in South Dagon satellite town. He was a daily-wage earner in a teashop. As a father of three he had to work 12 hours a day to support his family. However, he made some mistakes. Firstly, he supported Daw Aung San Suu Kyi wholeheartedly. Secondly, he would not participate in a labor contributing ceremony that was to build a road in his

township. Thirdly, he refused to enlist in the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a pro-junta 'Non-Government Organisation.' Moreover, he refused to offer a cash-donation to the USDA, which was known as an MI informant.

Early one morning, on the way to work, he was arrested under code 54. At the trial, he told the judge sincerely that he hadn't committed any wrongdoing. The other detainees at the same court were each sentenced to one-year imprisonment. He got double.

Another example is a farmer who lived in Kayan, a township in Rangoon Division. He lived with his family in their farmhouse. His mistake was failing to appear at a labor-contributing scheme to dig an irrigation canal. The order was for every



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 *Dab* Tint Swe. *Dab* in Burmese language is a sword or dagger. Tint Swe has killed many prisoners with his *Dab*. When a prisoner's health dete-

riorates seriously, Tint Swe orders his wardens to drag the man behind the bushes, not far from the quarry, where he takes the prisoner's life with his *Dab*.

There are 11 units in the camp and a unit is formed with 120 inmates. They have to wake up at 4 a.m. and clean themselves within 30 minutes. But, even though they are not far from the Sit-taung River, the inmates can't get enough water. Breakfast is just a mug of ordinary boiled-rice. They arrive at the quarry no later than 5 a.m. and they have to work for the whole day until 9 p.m. Their tasks include dynamiting the rocky mountain, hammering the heavy rocks into small pieces, carrying the huge mass of rocks and then loading the carriages on the railway line. The stones are then sent for use at every kind of construction site including highway building. Prisoners are not allowed to walk slowly. Everyone has to work quickly and they're allowed to urinate only once for the whole day. If a prisoner is exhausted and slows down, every whip and stick is ready for him. A unit of prisoners is required to produce up to 25 tonnes of the small stones per day.

However, under Thein Tun, they actually had to produce twice

this amount. Thein Tun was openly selling the extra 25 tonnes to private contractors for a daily income of more than two million kyats. According to the reliable source, Thein Tun was giving one million kyats to the then home minister, every month, in order to keep his dealings secret. So evidence of the extra-judicial killings has been buried along with the dead.

Min Khin was a prisoner who fled from the Taung-zun camp but was recaptured and put into a cell wearing iron-shackles. He also told us of his experiences.

Every morning in each barrack there is at least one inmate who never wakes up. There are 11 barracks so the first event one has to face in the morning is a mass burial. Lack of nutritious food, fresh water and medical treatment are not the only causes of a prisoner's death, there are other brutal persecutions.

In one case, a fellow prisoner was seriously sick and couldn't eat anything. Thein Tun saw this and prepared a table filled with rice and delicious curries, placed it before the sick prisoner and ordered him to eat. But he couldn't even move his hand. Thein Tun told the sick man that if he didn't want to eat the meal he would use it to feed his dogs. After

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 *Dab 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 Pan-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



with
a so-
one c

rocks
force
dista
high
quick
always
is ne
Finis
are 1
mud
ner is
to sh

or to
The
neith
the c
high
is sh
symp
cord
atro
have
auth
labo
of f
abus
velc

Japa

with a mediocre, salty fish-paste and a so-called 'vegetable soup'. But, no one ever gets enough rice.

They hammer the huge rocks into small pieces and are then forced to carry the stones long distances to load the lorries on the highway. Every one must work quickly, every minute. Lunchtime is always around 2 or 3 p.m. and there is never any time for breaks. Work finishes at 9 p.m. and the prisoners are then allowed to bathe in the muddy water of a small pond. Dinner is at 9:30pm, and they are ordered to sleep at 10 p.m.

Every morning, at least one or two *ye-bets* never wake up again. There is no physician or medicine, neither holiday nor rest. That is why the death toll at Zin-kyeik is always high. If a prisoner tries to escape he is shot dead. Do not dream of finding sympathy at Zin-kyeik *ye-bet* camp. According to Ko Kyaw Lwin, many atrocities and extra-judicial killings have been committed by the prison-authorities. Therefore, the Zin-kyeik labor-intensive camp is fresh evidence of forced-labor and human rights abuses by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

At such a terrible moment, Japan's decision to resume its Over-

seas Development Assistance is likely to give added support to militarism in Burma. It is also against the will of the Nobel Laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the majority of Burmese people.

Japan ought to participate in a concerted effort along side the EU and the US in raising genuine dialogue between the junta and the opposition parties. It is regrettable that some governments and organizations have an attitude of leaning towards and accepting the Myanmar Generals' rule.

This attitude is not shared by Bill Jordan, Secretary-General of the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). The ICFTU is made up of 216 trade unions from 145 countries. Mr. Jordan spoke at an international teachers' conference in Bangkok on July 25 this year.

"Burma is the biggest labor camp in the world," he said. "Despite the junta's claims that it is working to wipe out forced labor, the practice has not diminished in any way at all. Any serious investigation would show that the pronounced initiatives are cosmetic measures for international consumption and haven't touched the people of Burma."

Zin Linn.

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 3 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.

a cou
song
as j
ours
Bas
their

It was in our adulthood. We young people appreciatively had long hair, bell-bottom pants and long-sleeved shirts for a couple of years. At the same time, we were introduced to dynamic music songs on the radio. And not only songs, but also self-defense sports such as judo and karate attracted the youth. We had some challenges among ourselves, and then fighting followed. It became a tradition in that period. Basically, it was rude behavior. However, with those actions, they vented their anger at the so-called Socialist regime that had undressed from their military uniforms and cracked down on the people.

Tin Maung Oo
A Rose
in December '74



By
Maung Maung Taik



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, but also activities for the country and people. To give some examples, we participated in June 1974 labor strike and student demonstrations.

"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.

was c
racet
dents
gathe
heads
to do
shou
to m
Mau
anno
Cros
corp
bilty
1974
oppo
5000
520
year
incl
pris
abo
bett
join
Wit
diti
and
stuc

was disrespectfully laid out at an old racetrack. The people and we students became angry with the junta and gathered there. The sun was on our heads. We were thinking about what to do next, when we heard someone shout. "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. Students took responsibility for holding a dignified funeral.

Thus, on December 10, 1974, we were put in prison for opposition to the government. Over 5000 people were arrested and about 520 were sentenced to four to ten years imprisonment.

Ko Tin Maung Oo was not included in the arrests. However, in prison, there were plenty of rumours about him: He was shot dead, he had betrayed the student activities, he had joined an ethnic armed group etc. Within two years, while prison conditions deteriorated, he was arrested and sent to the prison with other student leaders.



Strikes began after the junta made a new constitution announcing that there were no political prisoners. It meant that we were not political prisoners anymore and we had to behave like criminal prisoners. The labor unionists and student activists including high school students inside the prison rejected the authorities' idea and refused their unjust orders. We decided that our next step would be a hunger strike. Consequently, the prison authorities cracked down on

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.

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 cellmates 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

dared

is a hu
need
wheth
anoth
muscl
It ma
was ti

the r
shou
comr
"The
the p
loudl
of us
hearc
held
stron
I trie



The price of liberty has
never been cheap and
in Burma
it is particularly high.

Aung San Suu Kyi

dared not say anything and ran away.

Tin Maung Oo said, "There is a hunger strike in Hall 3. You guys need to participate. I don't know whether I'll be executed or moved to another place." Then he ran away, the muscles on his back covered in sweat. It made him like a stone statue. It was the last time we saw him.

Two weeks later at 4 a.m. in the morning, we heard someone shout. It was him. "Go ahead my comrades. I want to say goodbye---" The words were incoherent because the prison staff were crying out loudly. They did not want the rest of us to hear Tin Maung Oo. But I heard him and grit my teeth while I held the iron bar. My heart was not strong anymore and I cried although I tried to control myself.

Later, I gently approached

the two criminals who sent breakfast. They said, "Tin Maung Oo said goodbye to you all. However, the staff yelled aloud and you were not able to hear him."

Tin Maung Oo who had said goodbye to us was not moved to another hall or prison for a moment. He was sent to the place where we could not reunite again. The authorities hanged him, destroying a future prominent leader who opposed the junta. However, his portrait is still alive in the hearts of current student activists as he bravely gave his life for his beliefs. The hero of the December 1974 student movement will be alive within the history of the country as there is a saying, "Martyrs never die."

Maung Maung Taik

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.

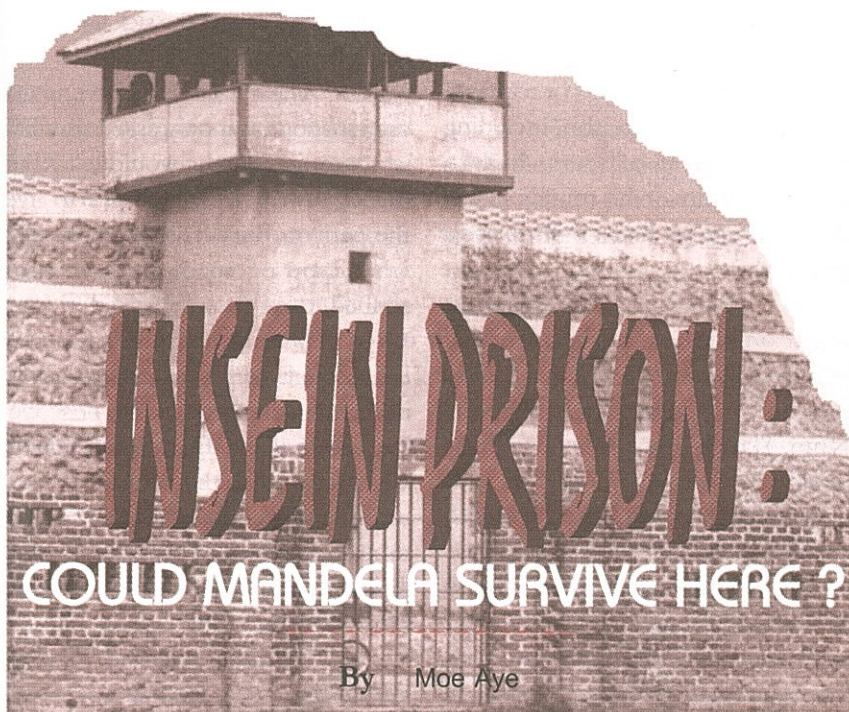
He was arrested by Military Intelligence on November 7,1990. He was charged under section 5(J) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act and was sentenced to seven years imprisonment with hard labor. At the time of his arrest, he was working for the ABFSU and was also carrying out duties for the NLD youth.

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.

“Whoever you are, leave it at the prison gate.
There are no politicians, doctors, teachers, monks,
nuns or students. You are all prisoners. You are all the same.”

Those are the greeting words
for every new political prisoner in Burma.
The jail authorities subscribe to the junta's official line that
there are no political prisoners in the jails.



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

After hearing of U Tin Maung Win's premature death, we requested that Dr. Soe Kyi provide proper medicine for us. He replied, "You're lucky that we are even kind enough to prescribe Burspro and Sodamint."

though we suffered from different ailments.

Not surprisingly, U Tin Maung Win (NLD-MP) and U Sein Win died in Insein prison in January 1991.

U Tin Maung Win was suffering amoebic dysentery but he never received any proper medication. Only when he fell unconscious did the jail authorities finally send him to the prison hospital. He died shortly after. The authorities claimed he had died of leukemia.

After hearing of U Tin Maung Win's premature death, we requested that Dr. Soe Kyi provide proper medicine for us. He replied, "You're lucky that we are even kind enough to prescribe Burspro and Sodomite. If MI (Military Intelli-

gence) knew about that, we [doctors and medics] would be fired. We were told not to give any treatment to those who are awaiting trial or currently being tried."

Occasionally, when we were very fortunate, we were given Tetracycline, Ampicillin or Paracetamol. Although prisoners are not doctors we are familiar with antibiotics. One cycle of antibiotics is 16 capsules for 4 days but we never received enough capsules. At most, we received 4 capsules. If we complained, the doctors and medics would say, "Why do you think you're special? There are many other patients here. If you received 16 capsules, how can we provide for the others?"

Finally, we realized that assuming the humiliating official posture in our cells to request treatment was not worth it as we never received treatment except for Buspro and Sodamint.

In February 1991, a Rangoon Institute of Technology [R.I.T] student suffering from a bad toothache met Dr. Soe Kyi.

The doctor asked him, "Where does it hurt?" The student replied, "My lower left jaw." Dr. Soe Kyi smiled and said, "Okay, use your right side [to eat food]."

The student became angry and screamed, "You are not a doctor!"

"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."

or An

suppli
side, b
to buy
ers fo
be th
provi
violat
MI.

pay si
mon

"You
You :

He e
being
ethic
oper
tance
care
need

We replied,
"How can we pay
since we are not allowed to hold money?"
We were upset and angry.
"You are not a real medical worker!
You are not even a human-being!"

or Ampicillin.

We asked him to buy medical supplies for the operation from outside, but he said he could not afford to buy supplies, and asked the prisoners for money. In addition, he could be thrown in jail if he were caught providing medical supplies, as it is a violation of the Jail Manual rules and MI.

We replied, "How can we pay since we are not allowed to hold money?"

We were upset and angry.
"You are not a real medical worker!
You are not even a human-being!"

Khin Maung Nwe disagreed. He explained if he wasn't a human being and didn't understand medical ethics, he would leave Moe Zaw Oo's operation to the hospital, with assistance from his co-workers who don't care whether they use unhygienic needles and equipment.

Indeed, there would be a high risk of contracting HIV disease if we let Moe Zaw Oo be operated on at the prison hospital.

The medical workers, who also treat the Thai Aids patients, have little idea about the deadly virus and neglect cleaning needles and syringes. We later found out that some "medical workers" are drug addicts and are infected by HIV.

Finally, we cut a deal with Khin Maung Nwe. A political prisoner gave him his fancy T-shirt, worth 800 kyats, in exchange for Moe Zaw Oo's treatment.

I admire Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in a South Africa prison, but I wonder whether Mandela could have survived in Insein prison.

Moe Aye

From **Ten Years On**

About the Author

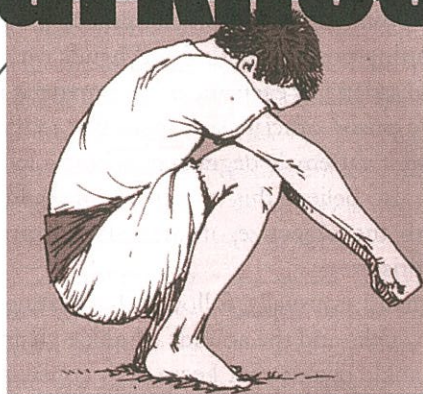
Thet Hmu was a member of the Students' Union in 1988 and later, a member of the Democratic Party for New Society.

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.

which
callec
arrog
with :
chain
anoth

5:30 :
Then
barra
comi

From Darkness



to Light

By Thet Hmu

A blurred and hazy backdrop could be seen behind the brick wall, which was twice the height of a man and enclosed the prison barracks I called home. The main wall, a second boundary around the prison barracks, arrogantly stood on high, looking down upon us. One section was studded with a stockade and main office, as well as an arsenal. Heavy locks and steel chains dangled on the iron doors. For more than an hour we stared at one another, each with our own smile -- the jail's main gate and me.

A sentry in the tower lookout booth over the main gate sounded 5:30 am. This was followed by calls from other sentry booths along the wall. Then a dark silhouette came out of the morning mist and entered our special barrack. All of a sudden, the quiet of the morning was broken by the booming command: 'poun-zan.'

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 fistled 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

night.

man rig
make a vi
allowed t
sit quiet
showers

take up
before 5
inmates
them up
approach
or an en
I shout
loud wa
mates ir
every tir
zan,' th
trample
forgetta
was rele
I decide
word I
ding m
other i
prayed
vey me
could n
my fello
they mu
confide
usual. F
sion wa
was ne
again.

night.

If SLORC officials or human rights committee members make a visit to our prison, we are not allowed to speak all day. We have to sit quietly, and our daily meals and showers would also be late.

Now I have volunteered to take up early morning sentry duties before 5 o' clock so that my fellow inmates could sleep longer. I wake them up when the prison wardens approach our barrack. If a warden or an employee is seen approaching, I shout 'poun-zan.' Although my loud warning benefits my fellow inmates in some way, my heart sinks every time I speak the words 'poun-zan,' the command that has always trampled our pride. 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. Last night, in bidding me farewell, my friends and other inmates sang many songs, prayed for me and asked that I convey messages to their loved ones. I could not sleep at all; neither could my fellow inmates. In the morning, they must have fallen into deep sleep, confident that I would wake them as usual. Knowing this, my earlier decision was dissolved by my tears and I was nearly ready to shout 'poun-zan' again.

This morning I had the opportunity to pay my respects to the elders in other cells. I also managed to send some clothes to the east-wing of the main jail. The clothes, which were meant to be worn upon my release, were smuggled into the prison. I had kept them in a safe place because U Tin Aung Aung, the people's representative from Mandalay, U Paik Ko of Pakokku and Gangaw representative threatened that they would pour water on me on the day I was freed as it was Thingyan time, the water festival of the Burmese people. While I was paying respects to the elders, someone from the prison office came to our barracks and told me that the prison officials wanted to see me at the office. First I went to change my clothes and I then walked slowly out of the east wing towards the main jail compound.

I gave a final look at the prison barrack I had made home for many years. It was called 'Tharrawaddy Special Cells' and was surrounded by an iron fence. There were three barracks in the compound, each made up of 12 cells. The barrack in the front is well-known because Saya San lived there in his final days. Saya San was a revolutionary hero among the farmers who organized a revolt against the British rulers. Nobody occupies that cell now and it has been main-

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

probably be back in jail and that I did not like the government. Hla Tun was astonished and speechless. He was shocked and scared to hear such a rebuttal.

My heart was pounding when I walked through the main jail gate and as soon as I stepped through the gate my preconceived notion of life on the outside disappeared. I was greeted by a very distressful scene -- women in shabby, dirty, patched clothes, carrying entirely naked children. From the look of those women it was obvious that they have been exposed to the sun, rain and cold weather. I thought that their sun-burnt hair must never have been touched by any type of oil. These women, in fact, were there to visit their husbands who remained in the prison.

The women were tussling with one another to get entry to the guest hall. A child cried out in a desperate mother's arms. Prison wardens were yelling at the women. My friends now inside the prison were used to beatings and being yelled at by wardens. It was our lifestyle. It was a kind of hell, far removed from human society. However, I was able to endure this ill-treatment in the prison because I always thought that I was in there to serve the interests of the people. I believed that it was the highest form of struggle for a man of honor. Sometimes, I was angry and vindictive because of the physical and mental torture inflicted on inmates; sometimes, we would all make fun of it.

Now I was out of prison for just a couple of minutes and I could not bear the painful feelings in my heart when I saw those women and children who endured the severe blows of a political system they would never comprehend. For six years I did not have a chance to witness the ills of society. In fact, I was totally unprepared to be greeted by the realities of the outside world.

I caught my breath and was actually relieved when a police lock-up van appeared on the road. Ahead was the desolate and dreary road between the main jail and Tharawaddy town. I gave a final look at the old fortress as I thought about what the others would be doing inside the prison. This was the first time I ever had to ride in a blue police lock-up van. I have spent six solid years in prison but I never had a ride in the lock-up van before. I have never been to a police station. I have never been to a court.

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,

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.

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,

can nevering power in a posters, but

blue po of a to a cluste inform the van front o was a J perhaps as I wo ily, I sav coming toward as I tho to find my nef into a But he make He wa years c was now h tall as got i white told m to driv the jai manag some ploye

can never be destroyed by force. Being powerful and strong, they were in a position to handle judicial matters, but, they were morally defeated.

Not long after I got into the blue police van it stopped in front of a township police station among a cluster of *kou kou* trees, but I was informed that I could not get out of the van. I saw a white car parked in front of the police station. The car was a Japanese model and I thought perhaps it came from Rangoon. Just as I wondered if it could be my family, I saw my mother and my nephew coming out of the car and walking toward us. I was hiding in a corner, as I thought they would feel ashamed to find me in a lock-up van. When my nephew recognized me, he broke into a big smile, nodding his head.

But he did not make a sound. He was about 11 years old when I was arrested, now he was as tall as me. We got into the white car and I told my nephew to drive back to the jail. There I managed to get some of the employees to give

money and necessities to my friends still in prison. We then drove back to Tharrawaddy town and I came across an old friend, a fellow activist. Together we headed for Rangoon. It turned out that my friend's father was a Pyithu Hluttaw representative who is still inside the prison. It had been reported that his health was deteriorating.

On our way back to Rangoon, I did not speak to my mother or to my nephew and I forgot to talk about my family. I was asking my friend many questions about the changes and latest developments within the political parties. My friend said that there were plans to stage demonstrations when tourists poured into the country, as that year had been designated "Visit Myanmar Year" by the government.

This morning I had the opportunity to pay my respects to the elders in other cells. I also managed to send some clothes to the east-wing of the main jail. The clothes, which were meant to be worn upon my release, were smuggled into the prison.

He also talked about the Student Unions' movement, activities of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's public meetings and about her popular speeches. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has repeatedly said that

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

life ar
There
distan

group
and th
such :
with :

to my
milita
when
orga
longe
or so
some
of th
ing a
that
surel
invo
term
ing a
ness
pres
offe
car,
hanc
shou

roac
roac
whi
side
regi

life and they have their own philosophy on the nature of human society. Therefore, we inmates would seek out these motorists, especially long-distance drivers, who have the most colorful lives.

In prison, there are two strong forces that form groups -- the first group is made up of political prisoners who always oppose prison authorities and the second group is comprised of thieves and robbers. Prison officials such as the chief jailer, wardens and other employees prefer to collaborate with thieves and robbers who come to the prison.

I also had to explain the meaning and seriousness of 'si-mann-chet' to my nephew. You can call it a project or operation, sometimes similar to a military operation. These so-called "projects" are often launched in our country when a governmental organization is no longer able to handle or solve problems. If someone violates one of the traffic rules during a 'project period,' that person would surely receive penalties involving both a jail term and a fine. During a project period, the authorities would not think twice about the seriousness of an offense; neither would they care about the law. Basically, it is a repressive measure taken against unsuspecting and unfortunate people for minor offenses. I told my nephew that even if a car brushes the side of another car, police will grab the motorist and send him before a judge who would hand down at least a one year imprisonment with hard labor if the accident should take place during a project period.

In prison, there are two strong forces that form groups -- the first group is made up of political prisoners who always oppose prison authorities and the second group is comprised of thieves and robbers.

I heard a story of an unfortunate man who was driving his car on a road that stretched along the fields. He pulled his car over to the side of the road to check his engine. Unfortunately it happened to be on soft ground which suddenly gave way to the pressure of the car. The car slid into a roadside field. Legal action was taken against him under the "road safety project regulations" and the court handed down two years imprisonment to him.

It is difficult for a judge who might be in such a situation, because

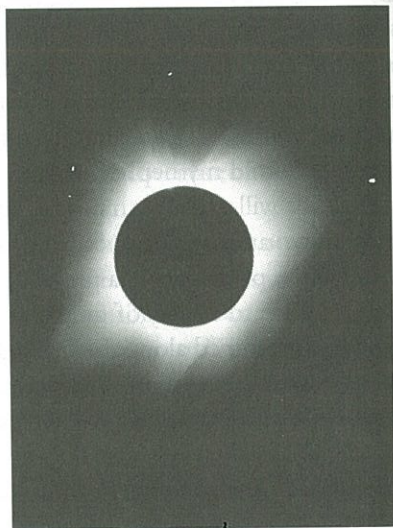
he or any other judge, could not accept a bribe and acquit the motorist during a project time. If you have a relative working closely for the SLORC authorities, your case may often be dismissed, but if you get involved in a car accident during 'si-mann-chet' period, it is likely that you would be given 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



mak
life
eve
hos
ye-b
the
car

circ
wa
inn
wh
Ma
wer
the
tirn
It i
kn
nn
the
me
str
wh
we
to
ne
to
ve
ve
nc
A
sit
se
ac
ar
th

make donations, your entire prison life would be filled with reprisals and eventually you would end up in hospital. If you decide to work at the *ye-bet* camps, one should be aware of the fact that the survival rate at those camps is around twenty percent.

There is a saying in prison circles among the chief jailers, jailers, wardens, prison employees and inmates; so many prisoners have died while working on the new Rangoon-Mandalay highway that if their bodies were laid down on the new highway, the line would stretch twice or three times the distance of that highway. It is surprising that no one seems to know that the present military government has broken, many times over, the record set by the Japanese government during World War II, which constructed the notorious 'death railroad' where thousands of people died while working on its construction. I needed to explain these matters to my nephew. We had spent so much time together while growing up, we were very attached to each other. He is still very young and full of life. He could not understand the prison system. Again, I remembered my mother sitting beside my nephew in the front seat. I realized that she had suffered acutely painful feelings when I was arrested after the '88 crisis. I could not think of how many mothers have shed

tears for their sons and daughters who lost their lives during these anti-government demonstrations.

We stopped at Hmawbi, about a one-hour drive from Rangoon. We had tea and snacks at a tea-shop named "Joy," but the owner of that shop did not appear to be happy. I knew that the tea-shop owner was U Soe, a Pyithu Hluttaw representative from Hmawbi township. After having been elected by the people, he had been in and out of prison very often and was interrogated many times. When he began his business, he invited me to attend the ceremony that marked the opening of his tea-shop. But that was in 1989 and I was not able to attend.

Before leaving the tea-shop, I asked the owner whether or not "Joy" was the name originally given to the shop when it was opened, as I remembered it as having a different name. "When I first opened the shop the name was 'Hero Zon,'" the owner told me. "However, the colonel of the township-level Law and Order Restoration Council told me to change it as it was too similar to Moe Thee Zun, the name of a leading student activist."

Thet Hmu

From BURMA DEBATE

Vol.4 No. 4

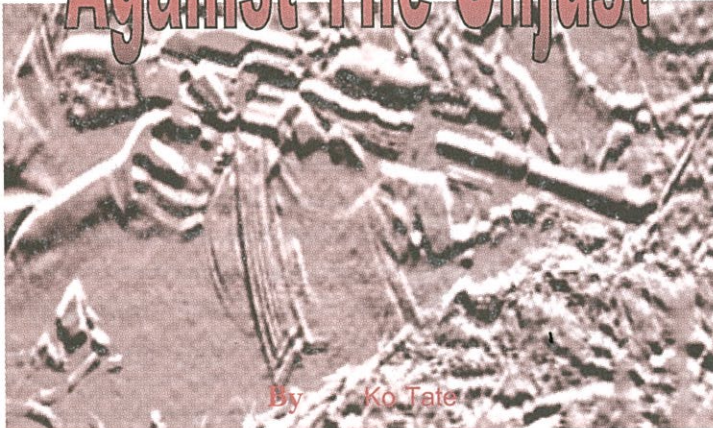
A man has the freedom to be alive, to create and to move according to his or her age and intelligence. It's the law of human nature, in other words it is called "just." If this idea of what is "just" is destroyed, it becomes "unjust."

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



By Ko Tate

are no
'human
because
banne
shapes

ment r
dictate
ture o
are m
junta's
Progre
questi
as the
been t
living i
rights
ties d
howe
with t

perier
tortur

1991
was a
lence
beca
was s
time i
priso
9:30
Later
some
(but

But, most people in Burma are not even aware of the term 'human rights', let alone its definition, because the military government has banned this concept in all of its shapes and forms.

Why? Because the government ruling our country is a military dictatorship. According to the structure of this dictatorship, the people are mistreated for the sake of the junta's desire to stay in power forever. Progressive thinkers and those who question the authorities are treated as the enemy. Information flow has been totally controlled. We have been living in the dark without basic human rights for years. The military authorities do not respect the rule of law, however, we have become familiar with the orders created by the junta.

I want to mention my experience of the junta's harassment, torture and hate towards ethnic people.

An ugly evening in October 1991: There was a great silence as usual because it was sleeping time in Insein prison. It was 9:30 p.m. Later, I heard some noise (but not

clearly). The noises were getting closer and closer. It was the disgraceful orders and beating sound of the prison authorities. Terrible! Although I didn't see the incident I understood what was happening.

Some newcomers were put in a room very close to mine. I heard the door close. The prison authorities then said to the leaders of the senior criminals, "they are the rebels. Don't be soft on them. Teach them how to behave in this prison. Until they understand the prison rules, beat them to death. We will take responsibility for everything." (Some senior criminals are asked to deal harshly with other criminals and political prisoners).

The sound of beating, shouting, crying and requests for mercy followed till 1:00 a.m. After teaching the newcomers the prison way of life, while beating them, a senior criminal ordered everyone to

sleep. There was a moment's silence but it didn't take long. The newcomers murmured as they felt pain and could not sleep. The senior crimi-

We have been living in the dark without basic human rights for years. The military authorities do not respect the rule of law, however, we have become familiar with the orders created by the junta.

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

behind
one we
from
remain
They h
when
their p
meal l
only f
with a
inedit
full of
intent
punch
butts

prison
wour
healt
meal:
extre
ture.

they
seizi
Hov
were
to e
life
yea:
mer

Pw
Ka:
not
old

behind their backs with ropes. After one week, the stocks were removed from their legs but their hands remained tied behind their backs. They had to feed each other backwards when they ate their meal. Some put their plate on the floor and ate the meal like an animal. They received only four or five spoonfuls of rice with a soup made of both edible and inedible unwashed vegetables. It was full of uncut rice and sand, which was intentionally mixed in it. Beating, punching and burning with cigarette butts was an everyday experience.

When I saw them in Insein prison, their hands were full of terrible wounds. All of them were in bad health, as they could not get regular meals. Some were very old and became extremely sick as a result of the torture.

They had explained that they were not involved with the arms seized by the military authorities. However, they were all sentenced to either death, life or at least 15 years imprisonment.

Saw Pway Pwar, a Karen boy, was not even 15 years old, yet he was

sentenced to 20 years. He was only in grade five, in middle school, and he didn't know why he was arrested. An elder explained to him that he was given a 20-year jail term. His parents were killed in front of him and he had no idea where his siblings were.

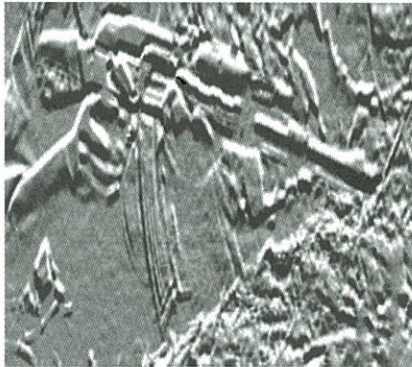
Another Karen man explained, in tears, that after his wife and eldest daughter were arrested, his son was beaten and shot to death in front of the villagers. His 7-year old daughter was left there crying. There was no shelter for her as the helicopter destroyed their house, and all of her relatives were killed or arrested.

He was very worried for her.

At the prison gate, the prison officer in charge, U Hla Myint, used his military boots to beat Saw Lar Bwet Say, a former judge of Bogale township, without reason.

A 68-year-old Karen man could not move his hands as a result of having them tied behind his back

for a long time. We requested the responsible persons in prison to provide medical treatment but there was no reply. The newcomers were given two aspirin tablets for what-



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

**'Despite their jailers'
efforts to shackle their minds,
Burmese political prisoners
remain determined to learn
even under the worst of circumstances.'**

Learning Behind Bars

By **Kyaw Zwa Moe**

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.

to o
man
man
used
thor
beca
has
you
cont
tly, (r
Eve
ded
beat
oth
fro
junt
sure
be e
got

rioc
Th
and
arr
thr
har
tha
to r
we
sup
pla
Me
anc
on
attz

Political prisoners have tried to officially obtain the right to read many times. Yet whenever they demanded this right, the top jail officials used to say, "We don't have the authority to give you such a chance, because the Military Intelligence(MI) has ordered us strictly not to allow you to read." Of course, it was MI that controlled all political prisoners directly, even though we were in prison. Even worse, prisoners who demanded that right would be beaten or transferred to other remote jails far from Rangoon. The junta wanted to make sure our heads would be empty by the time we got out of jail.

The "leaf period" didn't last long. Three months after I and my fellow prisoners who were arrested at the same time were thrown in prison, a military court handed down our sentences. After that we were given an opportunity to meet our families once every two weeks and to accept food and some supplies from them. In prison, only plastic materials were permitted. Metal-made items such as steel spoons and plates were banned because prisoners could use them as weapons to attack their jailers or to fight with each

other. So all of the food we received had to be packed in plastic bags. As a result, our leaf age ended and a plastic age began. We managed to make notes by writing on the plastic sheets with a sharp stick. In that way, plastic sheets and sharp sticks became useful stationary for us, especially in our study of the English language.

For about a year after being sentenced, we didn't have any books. In our building, however, there were

In our building, however, there were some older political prisoners who had a good command of English. Among them were Members of Parliament, veteran politicians, well-known authors and journalists, doctors and engineers.

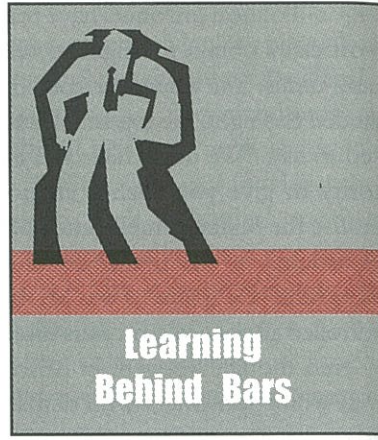
some older political prisoners who had a good command of English. Among them were Members of Parliament, veteran politicians, well-known authors and journalists, doctors and engineers. One of them could recall a lot of words and spellings, so we acquired about thirty new words from him a day. We noted them down on the plastic sheets. At that time he was our dictionary, but he was soon transferred to the Central Jail.

Our "study program" would

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-

lem was search two c impos we ha All th dig a l extre beca buildi could years took Digg withc and i even

least even search book came den. libra inclu ary a our impr peric who we h book oner stud; again

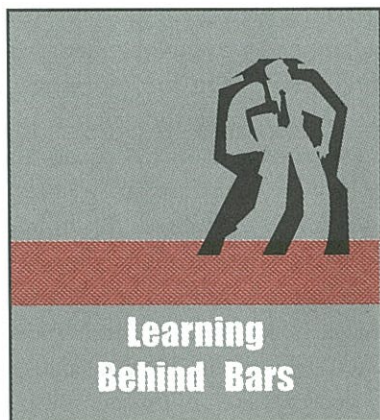
lem was how to hide them when a search was made, which happened two or three times a week. It was impossible to hide them outside, so we had to keep them inside our cell. All the inmates of my cell decided to dig a hollow cavity, even though it was extremely dangerous and difficult, because destroying any part of the building was a serious offence that could be punished by adding many years to our sentences. However, we took a risk for the sake of our study. Digging a hole in the concrete wall without tools was not easy, either, and it took us several days to make even a small hole.

We had to hide the books at least two times a day, morning and evening, because that is when the searches took place. After putting the books into the hollow, we had to camouflage the place they were hidden. Gradually, our cell became a jail library, with magazines and books, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, a dictionary and grammar books, concealed in our hollow. Our study program improved compared with our earlier period, and the number of prisoners who studied English increased. Then we had to tear the sheets out of the books and distribute them to the prisoners who wanted to study. I saw our study program as an act of defiance against the junta, since we were able

to break its unfair rules and foil the junta's intention to empty our brains.

Despite the difficulties, our prison library continued to run for a few years, but later we had to close our hollow permanently, because in some cellblocks, the authorities discovered similar cavities, and the prisoners involved were given increased sentences. Therefore, we had to change our hiding place. At the time, there were some Thai prisoners in our jail who were not as restricted as the political prisoners. We asked them to help conceal the books, so they hid some books upstairs and some under the ground.

From then on, disturbances in our study program were continuous. In July 1996, a special search was launched in our jail and all of our books were confiscated. On that same day, there was a fight between some Thais and a few of the political



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

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 anything like this.

PRISON WITHOUT BARS

The daily life of a former political prisoner

By Bo Kyi

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

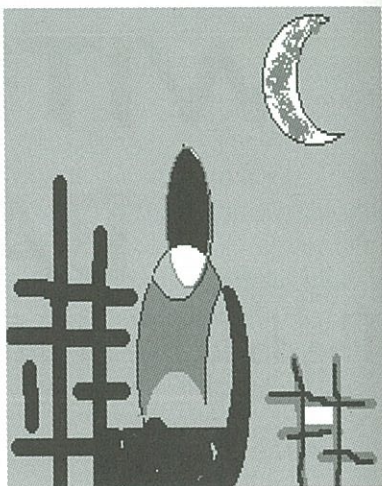
After I was released from my first imprisonment¹ I discovered that my difficulties were not over. I got a part-time job at a photocopy shop for my survival. Soon Military Intelligence (MI) interrogated the shop owner. "Why did you employ him as your worker? Don't you know that he was a politician?"

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



that I w
As for
the stat
state no
added
citizen.

men th
to pris
We rea

you wo
dictato

THRI

But yo
organi
MI, "I
gun ar
do so.
front

spread
afraid
unless

"If

Well,

And
then

that I would gladly stay in my house if they paid me money for my survival. As for their suggestions, I let them know that I could not write an article in the state newspaper. Actually, I very much wanted to write an article in the state newspaper that was based on the truth, but I could not write lies. I added that they had no right to send me abroad, since I was a Burmese citizen.

My sarcastic responses made them angry. One of the Intelligence men threatened me, while pretending to care about me. "Do you want to go to prison again? We are talking to you because we want you to deal with us. We really sympathize with you, so that's why we offer these arrangements."

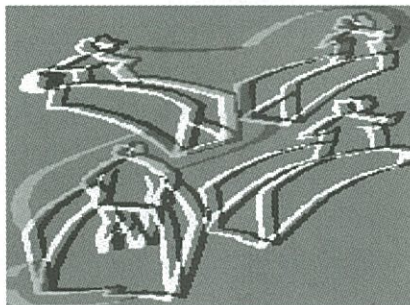
"Before I was released from prison," I replied, "I already knew that you would approach me with these bribes. I have my answers ready." But a dictator is never happy to hear the truth.

THREATS BY MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

"Soldiers and students are not enemies; we both love the country. But your officers did not keep their word. I do not want to deal with any organization or person who does not keep their word." I continued to the MI, "If you have the right to do anything you want.... Well, I see you have a gun and with one bullet you can kill me. And if you want to arrest me, then do so. But I cannot deal with you." I told them to get out of my house, in front of many people. They were ashamed and left.

The others were impressed when I spoke like this, and the news spread. They too wanted to say these things to the officers, but they were afraid of them. My friends and family warned me that I would be arrested unless I was careful. But the next day I continued my tutoring. Now my

"If you have the right to do anything you want....
Well, I see you have a gun and with one bullet you can kill me.
And if you want to arrest me, then do so. But I cannot deal with you."



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.

I she
wro:
behi

hom
the
raidi
frier

and
me
aski
held
my l
secr
this
mili
me.
to s

like
me
legs
be
accu

like:
I co
a dis
gatic
shoc

coul
poli
The

"Why should I run away?!" I shouted. I had not done anything wrong. They had no right to put me behind bars.

"You should not go back home now. Soldiers, policemen, and the Headmaster of our quarter are raiding your house," one of my closet friends informed me in great haste.

However, I went back home and when they saw me, they ordered me to sit in front of them without asking questions. The Headmaster held a letter with the order to raid my house. Then I was taken to their secret place. When my parents heard this they began to cry and asked the military officer why they had taken me. Their answer for my family was to stay silent.

When I arrived I was treated like a culprit. Five officers sat facing me across the table. I crossed my legs. They scolded me: "You should be sitting like one who has been accused."

"You should not treat me like a criminal, I am a private teacher," I complained. "Your letter requested a discussion with me, not an interrogation. So we should discuss." My body shook with anger.

While we were arguing, I could hear the voices of other former political prisoners in the next room. The officers were accusing us of

being involved behind the scenes in a small movement that had occurred in downtown Rangoon the day before, which I did not know about. They asked if I was involved.

I was determined to maintain my dignity and not to allow them to frighten me. I answered, "No."

But they did not believe it. And they told me, "If you were not involved, you must know who led that movement."

Again, I said "No." I added, "If I knew, I would not tell you."

"You did not take a lesson from your three years imprisonment," remarked one of the military officers. He continued, "You are asking for another imprisonment."

Finally, I told him, "If you have the right to do as you like, then do it. I cannot answer your questions anymore as I was not involved in it and I do not know who led the peaceful demonstration. Military Intelligence units are set up for that reason. It is MI's duty. When you destroy your units, then I might deal with you."

At this point, I heard other ex-political prisoners being sent back to their home after only a few minutes of questioning. I started to worry about not being released because it was taking more than four hours.

Then they changed methods

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

anything
ter from
the mili
talk wit
him at t
the out:

POEM IMPRI

sleep.
mother
room
While
over m
She sat
dha im
dhist d
concer
peeked
my eye
softly
meetin
queste
him ar
rested
what I
to wor
do as
see he
when
morni
meetin
ers.

anything like this.

That night I received a letter from the Chief Commander of the military. It said he would like to talk with me and asked me to meet him at the Kyaik Ka San Pagoda on the outskirts of Rangoon.

POEMS THAT DESERVE IMPRISONMENT

All that night, I could not sleep. Early in the morning my mother quietly entered my room, the room with our Buddha images. While she lifted the mosquito net over me, I pretended to be asleep. She sat down in front of the Buddha images and began chanting Buddhist doctrines. But she could not concentrate. She stopped and again peeked in at me. This time I opened my eyes. We spoke to each other softly as she encouraged me for my meeting with the Colonel. She requested that I talk peacefully with him and try very hard not to get arrested. Although I already knew what I must do, I did not want her to worry, so I promised her I would do as the Colonel asked. I can still see her soft face with her tearful eyes when she pleaded with me that morning.

I arrived for my private meeting with one of the higher leaders. As soon as we sat down he

showed me his hand. According to astrology, the lines on his hand predicted that he would kill many people in his lifetime.

I said, "I see you will kill many people without sympathy."

He said, "Yes, I know what this sign means. So I conduct meditation in order to control my bad temper."

I continued, "Because you are a commander, your words and wishes can influence many people's lives. But you must be careful with your decisions. If you want a quarter moved, those people will have to move. If you want to put someone in jail you have the power to do so, even if there is no evidence against them."

He and I sat alone for two or three hours. He explained many things, such as what the SLORC³ had been doing. Then he asked me why people disbelieved what they read in the state newspapers and saw on the state television; and why they preferred to listen to BBC, DVB, RFA, and VOA?⁴ I explained that people think the SLORC is always lying.

When I hold my hand in front of my face, you see one side, and I see the other. My hand looks different to each of us. But if I turn it sideways, we can both see the same

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

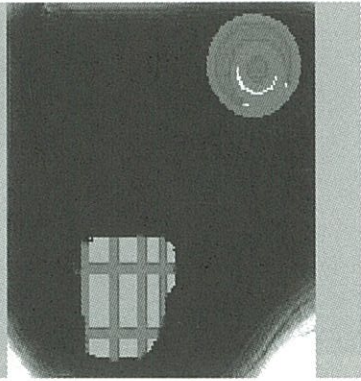
arrest me. But they denied me this request and I was kept at the police station. In the morning we had yet another private "discussion." They repeated the same threats and persuasions as I had heard during my meeting in the pagoda. But this time they added something. They asked me, "How does your family 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

Then he asked me
why people disbelieved
what they read in the state
newspapers and saw on the
state television; and
why do people prefer to
listen to BBC, DVB,
RFA, and VOA?



exact words to these poems, but that memory is lost. However, I still know what the poems meant to us.

"*Who is the worst?*" compared the three governments who have oppressed our country: the British government, the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League) under U Nu, and the Burmese military regime, or SLORC. We concluded that the SLORC was the worst of all the oppressive governments that our people have suffered.

"*The fighting peacock that will tear down the dictatorship*" honored students who had sacrificed themselves during the Independence Era, such as Bo Aung Kyaw, who was killed by the British government during a peaceful demonstration. We vowed to go on fighting to achieve our goal, which had remained the same: freedom from oppressive rulers.

"*Three friends*" referred to Min Ko Naing, Moe Thee Zun, and the author. The poem described the rainy season; the weather was so cold and we wondered how our comrades in prison could sleep. At the same time, our other comrades such as Moe Thee Zun were sleeping on the damp ground in the jungle. And as for us, we were living in fear and being controlled like animals. Our comrade with the pen name "Bo Bo," who is still inside Burma, wrote this poem.

In police custody I stayed with criminal prisoners, but they did not touch me. They thought I was a "Very Important Person." By now, the policemen were also afraid of saying anything to me. They knew that I would scold and humiliate them! I was treated quite well this time. The problem was that I missed the football match.

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.

By the time I was released it was October 1998. I had been in 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 come and visit me in Insein Prison she had already gotten married to someone else.

After my release in 1993 I found someone new. But politics got in the way of this relationship too. Only one week after we fell in love, I was arrested again. My girlfriend tried to meet me while I was in police custody and was denied. When I heard about that, I became extremely angry and I told the police officers how important it was for our future. They finally agreed to let me see her. She asked me, "How long will you be in prison?"

"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 or bear the great difficulties of waiting for so long.

"I will not be angry if you want to find someone else, as I cannot do anything for you until I am released," I told her. "But if you can wait for me until then, we will continue our life together." A year or two later, she got married to another man.

This is not only my story. It is similar for many other political prisoners. Some men were already married when they were arrested;

many of those men decided to sign a deposition in order for their wives and families to continue their lives without them. They volunteered to sign, but they were crying when they signed their names.

It is a daily fact of life for political prisoners and former political prisoners - choosing between one's love for a person and love for his country.

A WAKING NIGHTMARE

Former political prisoners suffer long after they have walked out of the prison walls. "Freedom" is not easily regained. We have difficulty making a living for various reasons. Nobody wants to hire us because they will run into trouble with the MI for employing a political activist. Moreover, we have been deprived of education, especially the skills that are very important in this era, such as technology and foreign languages.

Political prisoners are tortured both physically and mentally. We were cut off from society for many years. We were not allowed to read or write. Naturally, it is very hard to re-enter normal life. We feel depressed because we cannot find jobs. We get angry easily with others and want to avoid other people. Sometimes we have the sense that we are useless. These are signs of our psychological

"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.

trauma, including depression. We also suffer from mental and emotional 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 The 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



We need to make decisions to resolve national and ethnic matters ... We need to discuss matters democratically and develop a basic policy. Many ethnic parties sought to meet and negotiate but the authorities still refuses to do that. The SPDC tells the world it is willing to negotiate but this is not genuine. It is not the NLD but the SPDC who are very inflexible.

Aye Tha Aung

Secretary, CRPP

(Committee Representing People Parliament)

Currently in Insein prison

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.



Record of the **Red ROSE**

By Htain Linn

When I paid my condolences, he had already left this world.
After wards I wrote this short poem in the condolence book.
I called it "Generation of Flowers".

The bud is yet to bloom
Inferior to the wind
When a flower falls down
The rest lie in wait.

† † † † † † † †

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.

+++++

"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*

Kou
ing
bri
loo
agc
tha
wit
opi
pec
its
dis
the
flar
anc
of
unc
tre

but
Th
edi
ber
He
mu
edg
pas
wh
me
193
wri
My
pol
Bu
so
the
abl

Kou tree to take shelter from the glaring sun. The seats we used were old bricks from collapsed tombs. We looked at the mortuary located diagonally from us. The crematorium that ate everything put into its mouth without consideration was located opposite the mortuary. Once, living people and students were forced into its mouth. Unfortunately it did not discriminate between the dead and the living. I wondered how hot the flame was inside the crematorium, and if it could match the intensity of our feeling. Even though we were under the shadow of the *Kou Kou* tree, each of us felt on fire with grief.

Human beings' life is strange but the world is stranger than that. The definition of a cemetery is an edifice or stately building for remembering those who have passed away. However, it is more than this. Like a museum, a cemetery holds the knowledge of people and events from the past. Bo Aung Kyaw, a student leader who was killed by the British government in a peaceful demonstration in 1936, Bahmaw Tin Aung, a famous writer and a veteran politician, Thakhin Mya Than, also a famous writer and political leader, and the first elected Burmese prime minister U Nu and so on. All of their tombstones were there, not to mention the unaccountable martyrs' souls that dwelled and

were enshrined in it.

We, a group of seven people, knew nothing of U Tin Maung Win's fate. Therefore, sometimes we sat down on the brick tombs and waited for news. Sometimes we asked the caretaker of the mortuary whether our hero's dead body had been brought in or not. Sometimes we looked around inside the cemetery as if we were children in a museum. It felt as if we were practicing unperpetuity religious meditation. More than this, we routinely heard the sound of buses and people crying from other funeral processions.

It was 4 pm. A few people remained. At that time, we noticed that we were the only people still there and we were under surveillance by the Military Intelligence (MI). But we had no other way but to face this danger.

+++++

Cannot Placate

(We cannot placate... Significant events that scripted by our blood...

Revolution... Oh our heroes... who passed away in the democratic Combat.. The country in which the martyrs live..) 2 Our courageous people.. (Ko Daw Hmaing ² ..

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

smoke produced from the chimney into the air and watch the world from the sky.

"Please do not cry honey, my father dislikes crying. Therefore we don't cry. I request that you don't cry for him."

When I heard these words, I felt deeply upset. U Tin Maung Win's daughter said this to a woman who was crying for her father.

Yes! I thought to myself. I will not cry for him. He lived a revolutionary life. We, the people who are still alive, have to march on to our common goal. Instead of crying we must raise our utmost forces.

He died in prison a short time after he was arrested. The authorities announced that he died of blood cancer. In reality, he was killed by cancer. However, it was not blood cancer but authoritarian cancer.

Suddenly I saw one phrase on the memorial wreath:

Fallen star---

Caused by cancer---

Down with the cancer!

Our guiding star fell down to a place far away from us but still burns brightly.

+++++

Naturally, flowers: Are ready to impregnate the world with smell. Are ready to decorate the world with color.

Unfortunately, some flowers might be spoiled before they can bloom.

This can happen for various reasons but not every bud is destroyed. It is nature's law.

When a flower falls down.

The rest lie in wait.

Htain Linn

July 27, 2001

Note about the title: *In Burmese culture, the red rose symbolizes those who sacrifice themselves for the sake of the people.*

The above is dedicated to U Tin Maung Win who passed away in Insein prison on January 18, 1991.

- 1- Sometimes the Military Intelligence personnel don't allow the family to view the dead person's body.
- 2- Ko Daw Hmaing is a very famous Burmese nationalist writer.
- 3- Thakhin Aung San is an architect of Burma's independence.

**PRISON WALLS AFFECT
THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE
TOO**

Young Birds

Outside Cages

By **Aung San Suu Kyi**

lite
pri
In:
int
is r
pe
pa

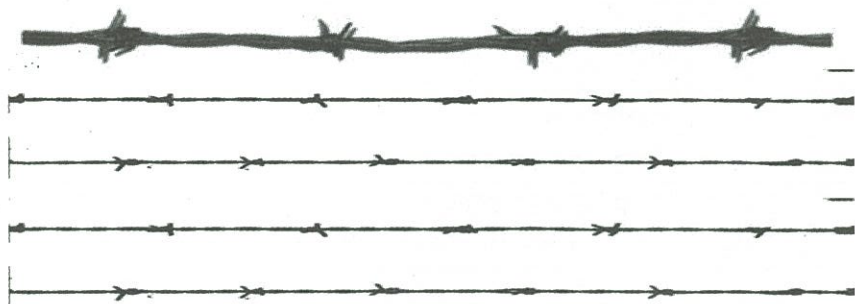
ho
a f
th:
saf
va
we
co
kn
an
co
he
an
liv
yo
di

■
T
T
T
T
T

There is a well-known book by Ludu U Hla, one of the foremost literary figures of modern Burma, about the heart-rending fate of young prisoners. The title of this book translates literally as *Caged Young Birds Inside Cages*. During the last seven years many young people have been put into the prisons of Burma for their part in the democracy movement. But it is not about them that I would like to write today, it is about the other young people, those who are left outside when one, or in a few cases both, of their parents are imprisoned for their political beliefs.

Throughout the years of my house arrest my family was living in a freed society and I could rest assured that they were economically secure and safe from any kind of persecution. The vast majority of my colleagues who were imprisoned did not have the comfort of such an assurance. They knew well that their families were in an extremely vulnerable position, in constant danger of interrogations, house searches, general harassment and interference with their means of livelihood. For those prisoners with young children it was particularly difficult.

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. A number of political prisoners who were placed in jail for their part in the democracy movement were kept without trial for more than two years. For more than two years they did not see their families at all. Only after they were tried and sentenced were they allowed family visits, permitted once a fortnight, lasted for a



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.

the
thei
ning
ren,
you
ing
of

elit
sch
eve
cer
ons
of
sid
pris
ren
pris
wo
for
of
So
ass
exi

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
withthin sheets of tin.

the care of fathers worried sick for their wives and totally unused to running a household. Most of the children, except for those who were too young to understand what was going on, suffered from varying degrees of stress.

Some children who went to elitist schools found that their schoolmates avoided them and that even teachers treated them with a certain reserve: it did not do to demonstrate sympathy for the offspring of political prisoners and it was considered particularly shocking if the prisoner was a woman. Some children were never taken on visits to prison as it was thought the experience would be too traumatic for them so for years they were totally deprived of all contact with their mothers. Some children who needed to be reassured that their mothers still existed would be taken on a visit to

the prison only to be deeply disturbed by the sight of their mothers looking wan and strange in their white jail garb.

When the parents are released from prison it is still not the end of the story. The children suffer from a gnawing anxiety that their fathers and mothers might once again be taken away and placed out of their reach behind several barriers of brick and iron. They have known what it is like to be young birds fluttering helplessly outside the cages that shut their parents away from them. They know that there will be security for their families as long as freedom of thought and freedom of political action are not guaranteed by the law of the land.

Aung San Suu Kyi
Letter from Burma (No.6)



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


has the honor to present its

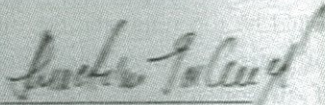
Homo Homini Award for 2000

to

Min Ko Naing

The chairman of the All-Burma Federation of Student Unions, Min Ko Naing, was arrested on March 23, 1989 for leading non-violent activities in opposition to the illegal military regime of Burma. He remains a prisoner of conscience who is frequently subjected to torture and solitary confinement. His only offense being peaceful opposition to dictatorship and inspiring advocacy for democratic freedoms. We grant Min Ko Naing this award in recognition of his great personal sacrifice on behalf of the long-suffering people of Burma, and call upon the Burmese authorities to release him from prison immediately and unconditionally. His continuing confinement is in violation of the regime's own amnesty which ended its sentence in 1994, and in defiance of international norms of justice.


Tomáš Pojar
Prague


Kristina Taberyová
Ambassador, Czech Republic



The above framed plaque was awarded by
Amnesty International, Italian Section
to Bo Kyi.

The Student Peace Prize was
awarded to Min Ko Naing
by
International Student Festival
in Trondheim
(ISFiT)
for 2001.





Human Rights Award

Daw Thida Htway

An elementary school teacher in the township of Pegu, you have played a large role in your country's long struggle for democracy and human rights in the face of the ruthless and unyielding military dictatorship that has controlled Burma for the past 12 years. In 1999, after years of secret leadership in human rights movements, you helped to organize a peaceful protest march planned for Martyr's Day, the 52nd anniversary of the assassination of the Burmese independence fighter, General Aung San. The march, in support of the banned National League for Democracy, called for the reduction of food prices, and increased pay for civil servants. The prospect of this march so frightened the government that military intelligence arrested you and 14 other organizers in order to crush the protest. Prosecuted by the government for association with the All Burma Students Democratic Front, your trial fell far short of international standards of justice. Civil judges work under the control of the military and defendants in political trials are not allowed to choose their own counsel. Former political prisoners testify that the trials are usually occasions when judges read out sentences and defendants and their lawyers are afforded little or no opportunity to speak in court. Unsurprisingly, you were convicted on December 3, 1999 and sentenced to life imprisonment in the notorious political prison, Insein Prison in Yangon. In grateful recognition of your dedication to the achievement of universal human rights and in protest against your unjust imprisonment, Trinity College today honors you, Daw Thida Htway, *in absentia*, and calls for your unconditional and immediate release.



TRINITY
COLLEGE

Evan S. Dobbelle
President

W. Miller Brown
Dean of the Faculty

Maryam Elahi
Director of The Human Rights Program

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

March 30, 2001

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



Human Rights Award

Daw Khin Khin Leh

Your suffering at the hands of your nation's secret police reveals the depths of injustice and the astonishing repression of human rights that prevail in Burma. A teacher in Bago, you are married to a political activist who is a leader of the All Burma Students Democratic Front, an organization that has played a leading role in peaceful political protests over the past 12 years. He was involved in planning a peaceful protest march scheduled to take place on July 19, 1999 in Bago. When the agents of the secret police could not locate your husband in their preemptive sweep of march planners, they arrested you and your three-year-old daughter in his place. For five days, your daughter Thaint Wanna Khin was the world's youngest prisoner of conscience. After your daughter's release, you were jailed in the detention facility at Wakteka and eventually transferred to Insein Prison in Yangon. At Insein, you were tried by a special court with others involved in the Bago protest. Charged under the vaguely worded provisions of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act and the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act, you faced the sort of perfunctory trial given to those in your country who engage in peaceful political protest. Charged with guilt by association, you were sentenced to life imprisonment on December 3, 1999. The next month, you were transferred to an unknown location. You suffer from unspecified lung problems, but it is not known whether you are receiving proper medical treatment. Today, Trinity College honors you, Daw Khin Khin Leh, *in absentia*, for your costly witness on behalf of human rights. In so doing, Trinity calls for your unconditional and immediate release, and directs the world's attention to the outrageous abuses of justice upon you and your family by the military dictatorship that controls Burma.



TRINITY
COLLEGE

Evan S. Dobbelle
President

W. Miller Brown
Dean of the Faculty

Maryam Elahi
Director of The Human Rights Program

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

March 30, 2001

This certificate is from
Trinity College of United States
for Ma Khin Khin Leah.

Human Rights Award

U Ye Thint



**TRINITY
COLLEGE**

Honored and respected throughout your home district of Bago as a gifted teacher and as a private tutor who takes students regardless of their ability to pay, you have been identified with Burma's student democracy movement since the 1970s. When the student movement against your country's repressive military dictatorship stirred in 1999, you assisted students with the distribution of pamphlets announcing a peaceful protest march on July 19, Martyr's Day, a courageous act that attracted the hostile attention of the secret police. Without a warrant, military intelligence agents searched your house, but could find no incriminating evidence against you. Nevertheless, they detained you and accused you of maintaining links to the student democracy movement and to exiled opposition groups. Like 14 others from Bago, you faced a trial by a special court in the Insein Prison in Yangon, a trial that did not meet international standards of justice. On December 3, 1999, that court convicted you and sentenced you to 29 years in prison. As a token of its respect for your long commitment to work for human rights in the face of persecution, Trinity College today honors you, U Ye Thint, and calls for your unconditional and immediate release.

Evan S. Dobbelle
President

W. Miller Brown
Dean of the Faculty

Maryam Elahi
Director of The Human Rights Program

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

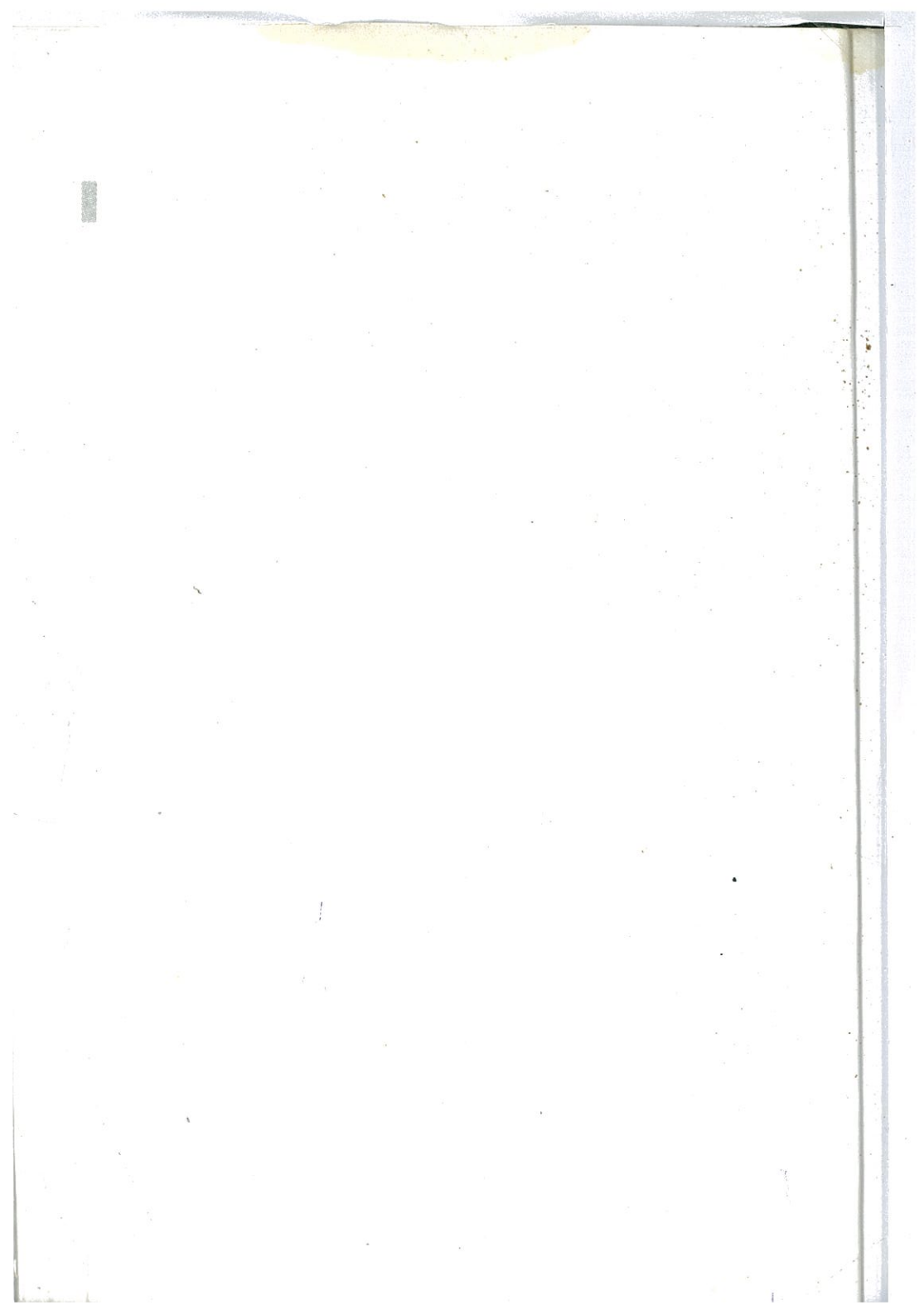
March 30, 2001

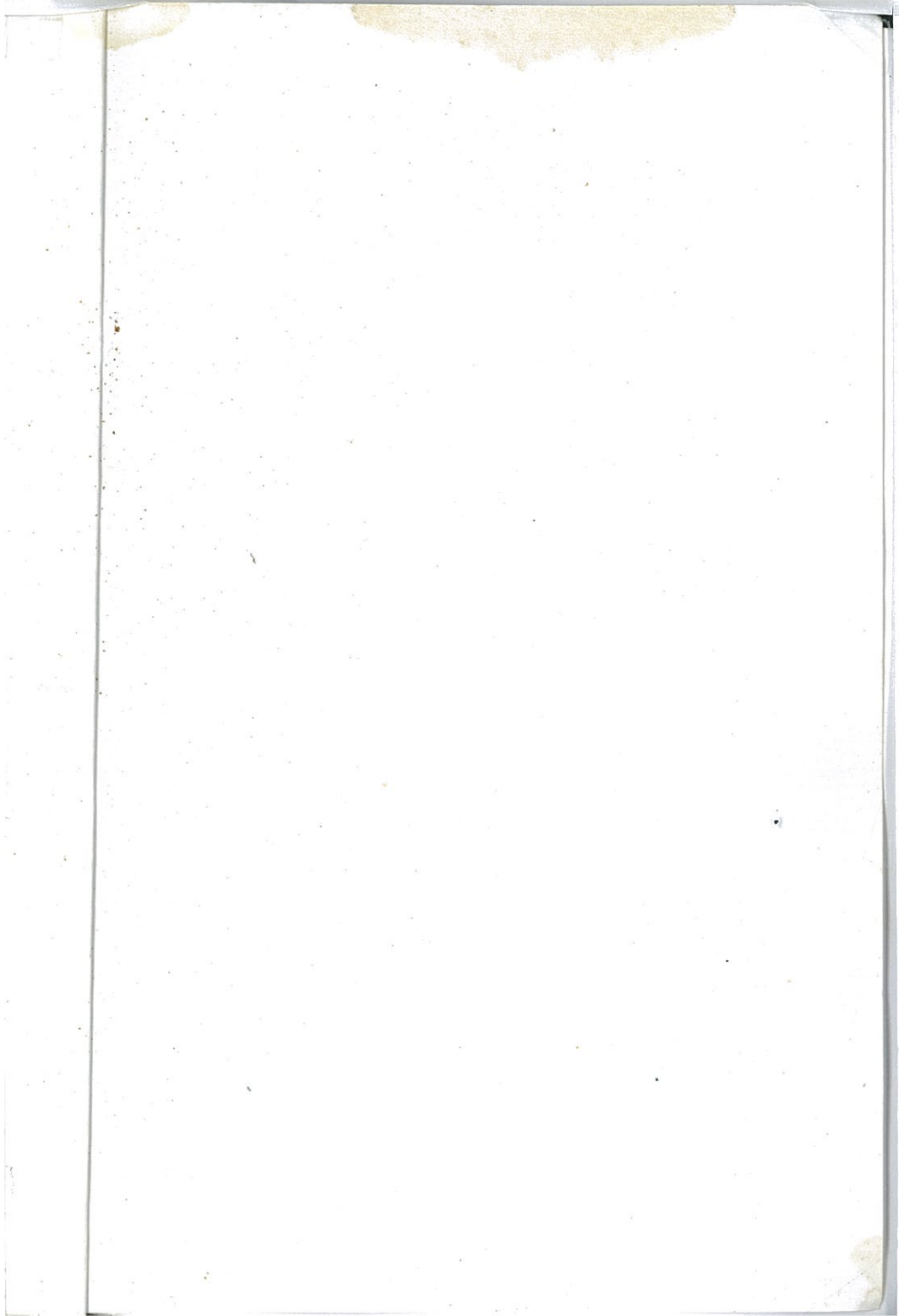
This certificate is from
Trinity College of United States
for U Ye Tint.

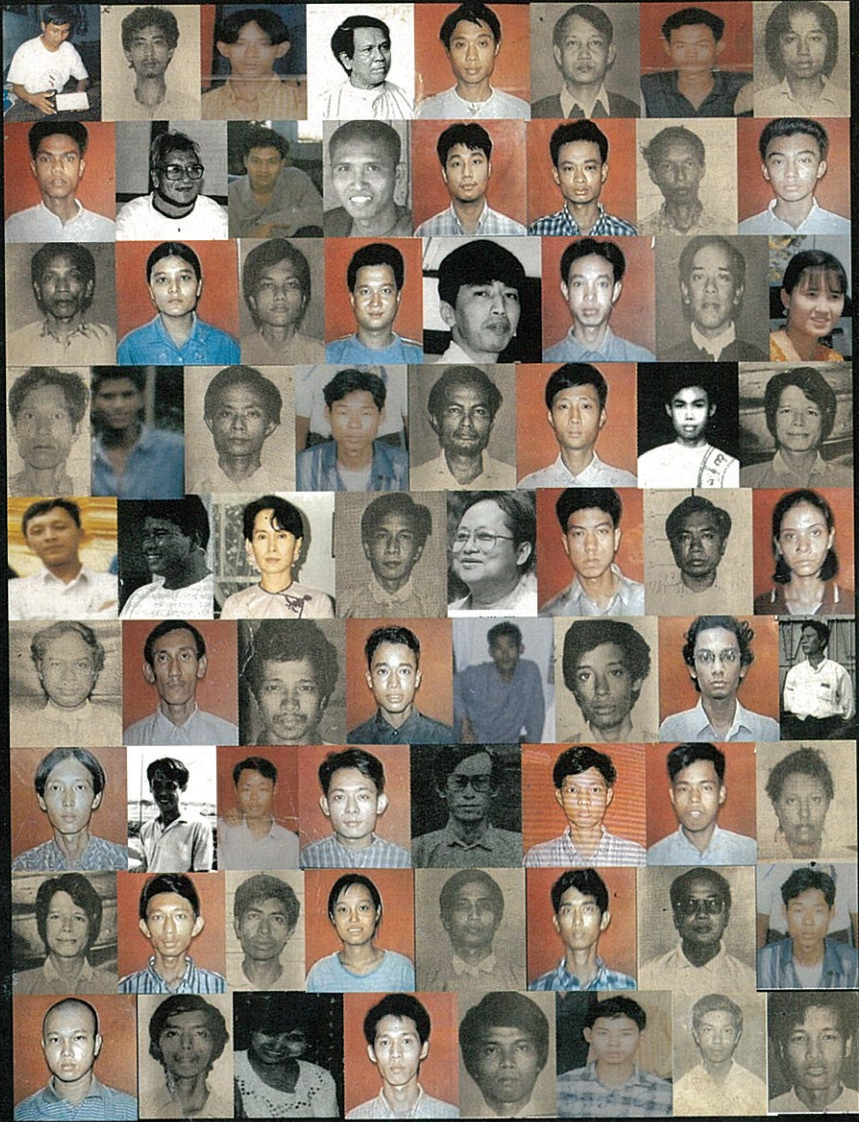
Note

Note

Note







**We want the world to know that we are prisoners
in our own country**

Aung San Suu Kyi