



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for January, 2010

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MONTHLY CHRONOLOGY – JANUARY 2010

Summary of current situation

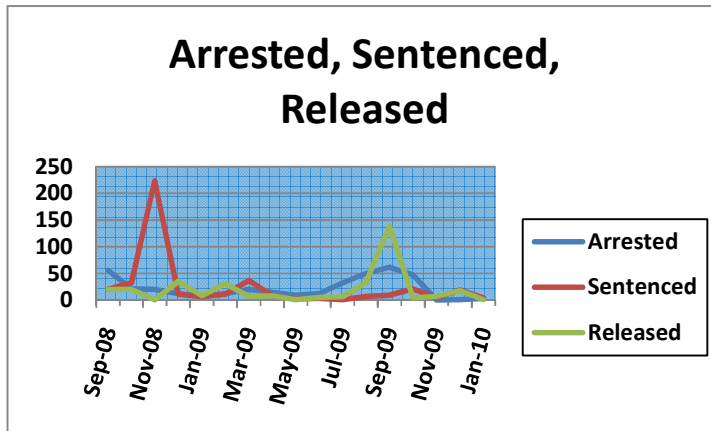
There are a total of **2,195** political prisoners in Burma. This is an overall increase of 18 in comparison to last month's figure of 2,177. In January, 3 activists were arrested, and 1 was released. The AAPP also received information about activists who were arrested and released before January 2010, and this retroactive information explains why there is actually an overall increase of 18 this month.

These include:

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Monks	253
Members of Parliament	12
Students	283
Women	180
NLD members	429
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	34
Ethnic nationalities	210
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	30
Teachers	28
Media activists	42
Lawyers	12
In poor health	129

Since the protests in August 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **1,166** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

Monthly Trend Analysis



During the month of January 2010, at least **3** activists were arrested, **4** were sentenced, **5** were transferred, and **1** was released. At least **128** political prisoners are in poor health due to the harsh prison conditions, transfers to remote prisons where there are no doctors, and the denial of proper medical care.

The month of January began with significant fanfare as Senior-General Than Shwe and the ruling military junta confirmed that national elections would take place in 2010. A date was not specified; however, insiders claim that elections will take place in September. Critics, including NLD leaders, have expressed concern that the elections will not be carried out in a free and fair manner, and thus will be used to legitimize the ruling generals' control over the nation. Furthermore, it is as of yet unknown whether detained NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the other 2,100+ political prisoners across Burma will be eligible to run for office or vote in the elections.

January also saw the continuation of Daw Suu's appeal of her latest three-year sentence, which was subsequently commuted to one and a half year of house arrest by Senior-General Than Shwe. Lawyers from both sides have made their final arguments, and a ruling is expected in February. In late January, unconfirmed reports emerged suggesting that Daw Suu would be released in November, after the rumored date of the national elections. Daw Suu maintains that these reports were leaked in an attempt to influence the court with regard to her appeal.

The final arguments of detained naturalized U.S. citizen Nyi Nyi Aung's trial were heard in January as well. The verdict, which was originally expected in late January, has been postponed until 10 February. Also of note in January was the handing down of the death penalty to two government officials accused of leaking sensitive information to exile news agencies. Additionally, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) launched a campaign in support of two imprisoned journalists, Ngwe Soe Lin and Hla Hla Win, and AAPP called for the immediate release of poet, Saw Wei, who was due to be released on 21 January, but remains incarcerated as of 31 January.

Treatment of prisoners and their families

January brought the continued mistreatment of numerous political prisoners across Burma. Naw Ohn Hla, a member of the NLD who was arrested for organizing weekly prayer ceremonies calling for the release of political prisoners in Burma, complained openly of poor living condition at Insein Prison while in court for a legal hearing. Naw Ohn Hla complained of excessively hot conditions, as well as overcrowding in the cell that she shares with nine other inmates. It was also reported in January that detained naturalized U.S. citizen Nyi Nyi

Aung was being held in solitary confinement. Additionally, the verdict in Nyi Nyi Aung's trial, which was due in late November, has been postponed until 10 February. The living conditions of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made headlines this month as Daw Suu's brother, who is a partial owner of the house-cum-prison, blocked a bid to renovate the property and boost security. In response, monks have boycotted religious services for Daw Suu's estranged brother.

Family members of activist and comedian, Zarganar, who celebrated his 49th prison in jail, reported that – in addition to existing medical conditions - he is now suffering from the skin disease, pruritus.

Five political prisoners were transferred in January. Prison transfers are often carried out in an attempt to restrict access for family members and lawyers.

Prisoners Released

Soe Myint was the only political prisoner to be released in January. Soe Myint was released from Thayet prison in Magwe Division, where she was serving a three-month jail term for violations of law related to reporting land disputes to the ILO.

National League for Democracy

There are at least 429 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) that are currently detained. This presents a decrease compared to the 430 that were detained in December. January brought the first major reorganization of NLD leadership since the party's inception when the NLD appointed 9 new members to the Central Executive Committee (CEC) in an attempt to infuse youth into party leadership. Subsequent to the expansion, reports emerged that some NLD members viewed CEC expansion as 'undemocratic' given that the new members were appointed as opposed to elected. Additionally, four 'prayer activists' including Naw Ohn Hla complained of prison conditions during a court appearance. Finally, following the junta's confirmation that national elections will take place in 2010, and rumblings that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi might be released in November, NLD leaders publicized their doubt that the junta would release any detained party leaders prior to the 2010 national elections, which are rumored to take place in October.

25 January 2010

NLD doubts junta will release detained party leaders

Despite Burmese Home Minister Maj-Gen Maung Oo having reportedly said, detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi would be freed in November her party leaders doubt it. Maj-Gen Maung Oo on Thursday told a meeting of local officials in central Burma's Kyaukpadaung town that Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi would be released in November when her house arrest period is over. But a NLD central executive committee member, Khin Maung Swe, on Monday told Mizzima that the information could not be relied on as it is word-of-mouth and carries no weight because it is not an official announcement. "The word of mouth version is not official unless announced at an official press conference, or in a press statement," Khin Maung Swe said. According to an NLD member in Kyaukpadaung, Maj-Gen Maung Oo, during a meeting with local officials on January 21, said

the government will release Aung San Suu Kyi in November and NLD Vice-Chairman Tin Oo in February. Though Tin Oo completes six years of house arrest on February 13, and Aung San Suu Kyi completes 18 months house arrest in November, observers said it does not have any significance. A journalist in Rangoon, following the news, said, “Both Tin Oo and Aung San Suu Kyi should have been released by now. But if they are released in keeping with their sentences, it does not have any significance.” ([25 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

19 January 2010

Win Tin allowed to leave Rangoon

Renowned opposition politician Win Tin, who remains Burma’s longest serving political prisoner, yesterday left Rangoon division for the first time since his release in September 2008. After spending 19 years in prison, where he was tortured, held in a cell designed for military dogs and denied medical treatment, the 80-year-old former journalist was released but prohibited from leaving Burma’s central Rangoon division. Yesterday however he set out in a convoy that included other literary figures within the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party to attend the 100-year anniversary of the birth of the influential Burmese writer, Ludu U Hla, in Mandalay, nearly 400 miles north of Rangoon city. “I don’t know how this will go. I have my tickets booked and all. If I get stopped at the bus station, then so be it,” he told DVB before leaving. He said that apart from being stopped for questioning by police, who followed the group to the bus station and photocopied identification cards, everything was otherwise “smooth”. ([19 January 2010 DVB](#))

New NLD central committee holds first meeting

Burma’s opposition National League for Democracy party yesterday held its first senior-level meeting following the expansion of its central committee. The nine new members, which include one woman, joined with the old guard of the NLD’s central executive committee (CEC) after detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi last month called for fresh blood in the party. Suu Kyi, along with detained vice-chairman Tin Oo, was not present at the meeting, while chairman Aung Shwe and secretary U Lwin were too ill to attend.

The opposition leader however sent a message “expressing her thanks and congratulations on successful formation of the CEC”, according to Dr Win Naing, who was included in the expansion. “Today we began a discussion on formation of the central committee,” he said. “We will do all we can to collect opinions from regional party members and give them a chance to pick out new members based on criteria set by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.” According to Win Naing, candidates must be “loyal to the party, resourceful, and constantly engaged in the democratic struggle” in Burma.

The comment follows criticism from lower-ranking regional NLD members that they were not consulted on the selection process for the new CEC members. Party spokesperson Khin Maung Swe said last week that the reformation needed to be undertaken quickly, and that a more inclusive process will be undertaken in the future.

Win Naing added that the party would “issue a statement soon and notify our regional members”. ([19 January 2010 DVB](#))

12 January 2010

‘Prayer’ activists appear in court

The detained organizer of weekly prayer ceremonies that called for the release of political prisoners in Burma yesterday complained about prison conditions in a court appearance. Naw Ohn Hla, along with three other ‘prayer’ activists, appeared at Rangoon’s Insein prison court yesterday where judges heard testimonies from defence witnesses, according to their lawyer. Kyaw Ho, a central court lawyer representing Naw Ohn Hla and her co-defenders Cho Cho Lwin, Cho Cho Aye and San San Myint in their trial, said their former school headmistress, Nyin Tin, testified in their defence. “Nyein Tin said that she knew Naw Ohn Hla had visited pagodas every Tuesday and prayed for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, but that did not break any law,” said Kyaw Ho. He said Naw Ohn Hla at the hearing complained about living condition in her Insein prison cell, which she shared with nine other inmates. She said that the temperature was too hot there even in the winter and it is posing a threat to inmates’ health. ([12 January 2009 DVB](#))

NLD senior-level expansion ‘undemocratic’

Members of Burma’s main opposition party have said that the recent expansion of the party’s central committee did not involve democratic decision-making. The decision by senior members to handpick the new additions from 14 assistant CEC members has been criticized by lower-ranking NLD members. According to Myint Myint Aye, NLD chair in Meikhtila, Mandalay division, regional party members were not consulted about the expansion. “I’d rather they ask for our opinion. We are a democratic party and I want things to be done in accordance with democratic protocol,” she said. Another former NLD member, Aye Ko, said that the CEC was “completely neglecting the opinion of the group’s lower level. The plan would have been acceptable if the divisional and state NLD groups could nominate candidates of their choice and the CEC pick out the final list from them,” he said. A spokesperson for the NLD, Khin Maung Swe, said however that the 14 new additions include state and divisional-level secretaries, a move which Mandalay NLD organising-wing member, Myo Naing, said would “create more communication between the CEC and the divisional and state-level members”. The NLD is due to release a statement next week formalizing the expansion, the first of its kind since the party was formed in 1988. ([12 January 2010 DVB](#))

11 January 2010

NLD elects 9 new CEC members

No central executive committee (CEC) member of Burma’s opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) resigned or was forced to give up his position at a CEC meeting at the party’s Rangoon headquarters on Monday afternoon, despite expectations that some aging NLD leaders would resign following detained General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi’s call for a reorganization of the party. But although none of the 11 aging CEC members stood down, they elected nine new parliamentarians to the committee, sources said. An official statement is due to be released next week. The CEC had been under pressure to introduce new blood into the party leadership following criticisms from NLD youth members and Suu Kyi’s meeting with three elderly and ailing CEC members last month, Chairman Aung Shwe, 91, Secretary U Lwin, 86, and Lun Tin, 88, who all retained their positions on Monday. “No one is out, because the party needs to be united—at least symbolically,” said senior member Win

Tin, adding that he is unsure how this expansion would make the party leadership more effective, but that the new leaders would certainly be able to work more arduously than the ailing leaders. One activist in Burma said that the party's decision not to force out the aging leaders was mainly to prevent a precedent of forcing elderly leaders out of their positions. There has been a dissatisfaction, particularly during the 2007 Saffron Revolution, among the NLD party's youth members who view the party leadership as being more focused on its mere existence than on representing the Burmese public. ([11 January 2009 Irrawaddy](#))

88 Generation Students

There are at least 41 members of the 88 Generation Students group currently in detention.

29 January 2010

Jailed 88 Generation activist calls for blanket amnesty

An imprisoned leader of the dissident 88 Generation Students group has called for a blanket amnesty for Burma's political prisoners before this year's election and an inclusive political process as two of the cornerstones of the group's election policy. In a letter written by Hla Myo Naung from Mandalay Prison in October, he said that he had discussed the policies with other detained activists from the 88 Generation group in prison during their trial in 2008. He said in his letter that the activists had decided upon the two provisions after much discussion and heated argument. Hla Myo Naung said that the issue of ethnic minorities was the main obstacle to the ruling junta announcing an electoral law. "Unless the issue of the armed ethnic groups is resolved, there cannot be any party registration law [for the election]," he said in the letter, adding that, for the ruling generals, the ethnic issue is more critical than the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD)'s role in the election. ([29 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

Ethnic Nationalities

There are at least 210 members of ethnic nationalities currently held in prison.

15 January 2010

Junta drops charges against four Kachin festival officials

The cooked up charges against four ethnic Kachin cultural festival officials in Bhamo city in northern Kachin State was dropped by the Burmese junta, sources close to the accused told Kachin News Group today. The junta had heaped charges on the four members of the Acting Committee for the city's second largest Kachin cultural festival on "Thanksgiving and Manau festival for Bhamo (Manmaw in Kachin) district" on November 27 to 28 last year. The charges against Chairman Hpaulu La Wawm, Secretary Naw Grawng, Maha Brang Tawng and Accountant Ms. Roi Grawng were dropped after they were interrogated at least thrice in the city police station, said sources close to them. The police had mainly charged the Festival Committee Chairman La Wawm saying that he would be held responsible, said sources close to him. The festival officials were charged with breach of government laws, such as publication and distribution of the 2010 calendar and a daily festival newspaper thrice, and for selling festival VCDs to participants without permission from the military authorities of Bhamo city and district, said committee sources. ([15 January 2010 Kachin News](#))

11 detained Arakanese youth produced in court

11 Arakanese youth being detained by Burmese authorities were produced before the court in Insein Prison on Wednesday to face charges filed by the police, said a relative of one youth. Police Official Than Soe, Inspector of the Police Intelligence Unit, is prosecuting the youth for alleged links to the banned All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC) based on the Thai-Burma border. The 11 Arakanese youths were arrested in several locations in Arakan State and Rangoon in early September 2009 on accusations of having connections with the banned youth organization. The youth were produced before the western district court in Insein Prison during the first week of January, and so far four hearings on the case have been held. The court will be hearing another 24 witnesses before the trial is concluded. The group was charged under the Unlawful Association Act on accusations of having links with and supporting the AASYC. Six of them were also charged with crossing the border illegally. The prosecutors have also pressed one explosives charge against Mae Lone, also known as Naing Soe. Eight of the youths were identified as Kyaw Win, Khaing Kyaw Moe, Tun Lun Kyaw, Naing Soe, Kyaw San Thein, Maung Naing Soe, Aung San Thein, Aung Moe Zaw. Most of the youths have graduated. ([15 January 2010 Narinjara](#))

7 January 2010

Shan party eye 2010 elections

A Shan political party that came second in the 1990 elections in Burma has requested a meeting with its imprisoned party leaders prior to elections this year, apparently with an eye to participating. The request was made in a letter sent to the head of Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Senior General Than Shwe. "The SPDC chairman in his independence day speech said that the upcoming elections will create a political environment where everyone can participate," said Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) party spokesperson, Sai Lake. "The party sees 2010 as the year when all must cooperate in bringing about Burma's democratisation and national solidarity," he added. The letter said that the meeting should be permitted so that the SNLD can "play our part in democratisation and the national solidarity," in what could be a reference to its potential involvement in the looming elections. The SNLD chairman, Khun Htun Oo, is currently serving a 93-year prison sentence in the remote Putao prison in northern Kachin state. He was arrested in February 2005 after holding a private meeting to discuss political transition in Burma, and is said to be in poor health. The letter also requested a meeting with SNLD secretary Sai Nyunt Lwin, who was arrested along with Khun Htun Oo and is serving an 85-year sentence. Eight other SNLD were also handed lengthy sentences. ([7 January 2009 DVB](#))

Monks

There are at least 253 monks currently held in prison. The January 2010 sentencing of eight activists, including four monks, for their role in the Saffron Revolution demonstrates the junta's unflagging clampdown on monks. This despite the fact that over two years have passed since the 2007 monk-led political uprising.

25 January 2010

Monks 'to boycott' Suu Kyi's brother

A prominent Burmese monks group will boycott religious services for Aung San Suu Kyi's estranged brother unless he backs away from a dispute regarding her Rangoon house-cum-prison. The dilapidated lakeside compound that opposition leader has been held in for 14 of the past 20 years has become the subject of a legal dispute. Suu Kyi's brother, Aung San Oo, claims part ownership of the house, and has blocked a bid by Suu Kyi to renovate the property and boost security. A statement released by the All Burma Monks' Association (ABMA) yesterday said that Aung San Oo should drop the lawsuit blocking the renovation, and stop collaborating with the Burmese government. "The AMBA is disappointed to see U Aung San Oo turning a blind eye to his status as a son of [Burmese independence hero] General Aung San and to the hardship faced by the people in Burma," it said, adding that Suu Kyi's brother was a "tool of the [ruling] generals" in Burma. ([25 January 2010 DVB](#))

21 January 2010

Eight charged for Sept 2007 activities

Eight activists have been charged for their role in the September 2007 uprising, more than two years after police in Burma launched a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests. The eight men, who include four monk and a school teacher, were arrested last year during a crackdown that coincided with the two-year anniversary of the so-called Saffron Revolution. Lawyer Kyaw Ho, who is representing two of the men, Thandar Htun and Ko Nyo, said that all eight were charged under the Unlawful Associations Act and the Immigration Act, which together carry a maximum seven-year sentence. The other defendants are Ye Myint, U Yaywata, U Kawthita, U Withudi, U Waryama and Kyaw Khin. "They were...[accused] of having contacts with the All Burma Monks Association and the Generation Wave [activist groups], and also charged under the Immigration Act for illegally crossing border to meet with those groups," said Kyaw Ho. He added there was "no legitimacy" in making his clients, who were arrested in their hometown of Mandalay, stand trial in Rangoon. Five of the men reportedly do not have lawyer assistance, while Kyaw Ho said that relatives of the eight had been barred from visiting them since their arrest. ([21 January 2010 DVB](#))

12 January 2010

Monk arrested for opposition to 2010 election

Meanwhile, a Mon monk, Ashin Uk Kong Sa, 28, was arrested by special police about 2 p.m. On 7 January in Thanbyuzayat Township in Mon State, after he launched a campaign opposing the 2010 election, Mon sources said. A friend of the monk told The Irrawaddy: "The special police arrested Ashin Uk Kong Sa for painting "No 2010 Election" along the highway from Moulmein to Ye townships to mark New Year's. When he was arrested, police seized a video camera, a computer and leaflets opposing the 2010 election. Later, a computer hard drive was seized from his room. He was treated at Moulmein Hospital after he was disrobed and tortured by authorities while being detained in Thanbyuzayat Township, sources said. New Mon State Party sources said that Ashin Uk Kong Sah, who is well-known in the Mon community, has been transferred to an interrogation center in Rangoon. ([12 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There are currently at least 30 Cyclone Nargis volunteers currently held in prison.

January 2010 was highlighted by the 49th birthday of activist and comedian, Zarganar. The prominent activist remains in prison due to his role in Cyclone Nargis relief efforts, and has battled poor health while imprisoned during the course of the past year.

27 January 2010

Imprisoned Comedian Turns 49

While popular Burmese comedian Zarganar spent his second consecutive birthday behind bars in remote Myitkyina prison in northern Burma on Wednesday, a small group of dissidents celebrated his 49th birthday at a Buddhist monastery in Chiang Mai in Thailand. “We offered alms this morning to the monks in commemoration of Ko Zarganar’s birthday,” said fellow comedian Godzilla of the well-known Burmese troupe Thee Lay Thee A-nyeint. “After all, he has made a real sacrifice for his people. We wish that he—and all the other persons who have made such sacrifices—live long and free from danger.” Zarganar’s sister-in-law, Ma Nyein, told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday that Zarganar is suffering from the skin disease pruritus. “I last saw him on Dec. 7, 2009. Like other families of political prisoners, we expect him to be released this year, but it all depends on the Burmese authorities.” “He is a very funny man who inspires confidence,” said Kyaw Thu, a famous Burmese actor. “He is a true artiste and I very much appreciate his good deeds and brave spirit.” Zarganar was sentenced to 35 years in prison for his involvement in the humanitarian relief effort in the Irrawaddy delta after Cyclone Nargis devastated the region in 2008. ([27 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers

There are currently at least 42 journalists held in prison. Two DVB reporters received long sentences in January 2010. First, previously imprisoned reporter Hla Hla Win received a 20-year sentence extension in early January, followed by Burmese courts handing down a 13-year sentence to reporter Ngwe Soe Lin, who was also accused of working with DVB. In response to these sentences, DVB launched the *Free DVB Journalists Campaign*, aimed at securing the release of Hla Hla Win and Hgwe Soe Lin.

29 January 2010

Junta imposes long sentence on journalist

The Rangoon Special Court in Insein prison sentenced reporter Ngwe Soe Lin to 13-years imprisonment on Wednesday for attempting to smuggle information to exiled media, according to prominent Rangoon lawyer Aung Thein. Ngwe Soe Lin was arrested in a Rangoon internet café on June 26th last year and accused of working for the Norway-based opposition radio station Democratic Voice of Burma. Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Friday, Aung Thein said, “Ngwe Soe Lin was sentenced to 13-years imprisonment under section 33(a) of the Electronic Act and section 13(1) of the Immigration Emergency Provisions Act.” Aung Thein said “The Burmese authorities arrested him on June 26 last year on suspicion of working for exiled media. But, there is no confirmed evidence.” Observers say The Burmese

military junta has cracked down on journalists who are suspected of working for exiled media since the saffron movement led by Buddhist monks shook the regime in September 2007. ([29 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

Free DVB Journalists Campaign

Rangoon Insein jail's special court handed down a 13-year sentence to a journalist of Democratic Voice of Burma, Ngwe Soe Lin, also known as Tun Kyaw, on 27 January. He was charged under Electronics and Immigration Acts. The Burmese authorities arrested him on 26 June 2009 in Rangoon and detained him at Aung Thabye interrogation centre. Ngwe Soe Lin played a vital role in recording the lives of children left orphaned by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. His video records were turned into a documentary, 'Orphans of Burma's Cyclone', and it was aired on Channel 4 in the UK and several countries. Along with another DVB journalist named Zoro, he won the 2009 Rory Peck award for best documentary – recognising his brave efforts to reveal the truth. Ngwe Soe Linn is the second DVB journalist given jail term within a month. On 30 December 2009, DVB journalist, Hla Hla Win was sentenced to 27 years in jail. She and another DVB correspondent named Win Maw, were awarded Kenji Nagai memorial award 2010.

DVB is initiating a campaign for the release of all its journalists languishing in jails, with the cooperation of international journalist and human rights organizations. ([29 January 2010 DVB](#))

18 January 2010

Family disowned young Burmese journalist

The family of Hla Hla Win, who was sentenced in December to 27-years imprisonment for attempting to smuggle information to the exiled media, had publicly disowned her because of her political beliefs. "Hla Hla Win's family opposes her political beliefs," said a colleague who asked for anonymity. "She seems soft from the outside, but she is a woman of strength. It was very tough for her to decide to go ahead without her family's encouragement. She is in a very difficult battle now without moral support. "When your family supports your beliefs, you've already won half of what you fight for. But if they do not support your cause, then you must hide what you are doing from them." Hla Hla Win was arrested on 11 September 2009 with her companion Myint Naing, in Pakokku Town, Magwe Division, after she interviewed several monks at the Pakokku Sasana Vipularama Pali Institution (West Wing Monastery). Initially, she was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment under the Export/Import Act for using an unregistered motorbike. In December, the Pakokku Court sentenced her to 20 more years for violation of the Electronic Act, which prohibits downloading or uploading data from the Internet that is damaging to the security of the military regime. She was not represented by a lawyer, because of the political sensitivity of her case, said her friend. ([18 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

6 January 2010

Burmese reporter receives 20-year sentence

A Burmese reporter who contributed video material to the Democratic Voice of Burma has been handed a 20-year prison sentence, bringing to 13 the number of imprisoned journalists in Burma. The news was met with outrage by leading international media watchdog, Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), and the Burma Media Association (BMA).

“People had been expecting signs of an opening and goodwill gestures from the military junta in this election year, but this extremely severe sentence on a 25-year-old video maker and the junta chief’s recent threatening comments leave little hope that the elections will be free,” the two organisations said in a statement. Hla Hla Win was first arrested in September 2009, and in October was given a seven-year sentence. Then on 31 December, she was found guilty of violating the Electronics Act, often used by the junta to imprison video reporters, and handed a further 20 years. ([6 January 2010 DVB](#))

Women

There are at least 180 women currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in January.

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least 34 members of the Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in January.

Labour Activists

There are currently at least 43 labour activists held in prison.

There is no news to report in January.

Students

There are currently at least 283 students held in prison.

There is no news to report in December.

There is no news to report in January.

Lawyers

There are currently at least 12 lawyers detained in prison.

There is no news to report in January.

Individual Activists

January began with the sentencing of two ex-Burmese government officials to the death penalty for leaking sensitive information to international media. The sentence was labeled a ‘disgrace’ by the All Burma Monks Association, and lauded the bravery of the ex-government officials. Later in January, reports emerged that detained naturalized American citizen Nyi Nyi Aung had been placed in solitary confinement. Also, Nyi Nyi Aung’s verdict, which was originally due on 27 January, was postponed until 10 February. Additionally, AAPP called

for the immediate release of imprisoned poet, Saw Wei, who was due to be released on 21 January, but as of yet has not been released.

27 January 2010

Burmese court delays verdict for detained US man: lawyer

A Burmese court delayed a verdict Wednesday in the case of a US citizen detained in the military-ruled country, whose release has been called for by more than 50 US lawmakers, his lawyer said. A verdict for the 40-year-old Nyi Nyi Aung was due Wednesday but his lawyer Nyan Win -- who also represents Burma's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi -- said it was postponed to February 10. "The court is not ready," he told AFP.

In December more than 50 US lawmakers wrote to junta chief Than Shwe, urging him to release the Burma-born detainee from prison amid health worries. The lawmakers said the charges against Kyaw Zaw Lwin were a pretext to hold him and that his "longstanding non-violent activities in support of freedom and democracy" in Burma were the real reason for his imprisonment. ([27 January 2010 DVB](#))

26 January 2010

Whistleblower moved to Bago prison

The former Burmese army official sentenced to death this month for leaking state secrets has been moved from Rangoon's Insein prison, as his family prepares to appeal his sentence. Win Naing Kyaw, who was arrested last year and charged with leaking information on top-level Burmese military visits to Russia and North Korea, was handed the death sentence and multiple prison terms by the Insein prison court on 7 January.

Another fellow whistleblower and former government official was also sentenced to death for the leak, while a third man was given a 15-year sentence. They are also accused of passing information to exiled Burmese media detailing North Korean involvement in a military tunnel project in Burma. A source close to Insein prison said that Win Naing Kyaw was moved last Saturday to Tharrawaddy prison in Bago division, 100 miles north of Rangoon. The transfer of prisoners is often done to restrict access for visiting family members and lawyers, who are now in the process of launching an appeal. ([26 January 2010 DVB](#))

Photographer appears in court

A man in Rangoon, Ngwe Soe Linn, who was arrested in 2008 for taking pictures of ballot stations during the national referendum yesterday made his first court appearance. Court sources say that a final verdict will be given on 27 January. ([26 January 2010 DVB](#))

25 January 2010

AAPP calls for release of poet Saw Wei

The Thai based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners - Burma (AAPP-B) has called for the release of poet Saw Wei at the earliest possible date, as his release was set for the 21st of this month. Poet Saw Wei was arrested on the 21st of January 2008 after his poem entitled 'February 14' which cryptically included the stanza 'Power crazy senior general Than Shwe' appeared in the Love journal. He was later charged with committing disaffection to the State and sentenced to two years imprisonment along with his judicial custody term, AAPP-B said. "In fact, his judicial custody term must be deducted from his prison term starting from

the date of his arrest. But the court counted his judicial custody starting from the date of trial commencement. So, the previous three months custody means unlawful custody. In this way he is losing his lawful rights. We call for the immediate release of poet Saw Wei,” exclaimed AAPP-B Joint-Secretary Bo Kyi. ([25 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

Verdict for US citizen ‘due Wednesday’

The outcome of the trial in which a Burmese-born US citizen is accused of fraud and forgery will be announced on Wednesday this week, his lawyer said. The lawyer for Nyi Nyi Aung, also known as Kyaw Zaw Lwin, said however that the three charges brought against his client by a Rangoon court are false. If found guilty, he could face a maximum 17 years in prison. Analysts have also argued that the trial was politically motivated, stemming from the work Nyi Nyi Aung has done as an activist since fleeing Burma to the US in 1993. ([25 January 2010 DVB](#))

22 January 2010

Final arguments heard in Burmese-American’s trial

The final arguments by all lawyers in the trial against Burmese-born American citizen, Kyaw Zaw Lwin (aka) Nyi Nyi Aung was heard by a special court in Rangoon’s notorious Insein prison on Friday. Nyan Win, one of the defence lawyers of the American citizen said “Today we submitted our final arguments. The verdict will be given on January 27.” “We don’t know what will be the outcome of the trial. We will have to wait and see on January 27. The court will decide what we will be doing next,” Nyan Win said. ([22 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

20 January 2010

US citizen reportedly in solitary confinement

The Burmese-born US citizen detained in a Rangoon prison has been placed in solitary confinement, along with two other inmates, prison sources say. The reasons for the punishment are not clear. The source said that Kyaw Zaw Lwin, also known as Nyi Nyi Aung, and two political activists, Aung Thu and Min Min Htun, were moved to solitary confinement on 12 January. It is the second time Nyi Nyi Aung has been placed in a solitary, and follows reports that his relatives have been denied entry to the prison to see him. The US embassy in Rangoon, which has had sporadic consular access to Nyi Nyi Aung, said they had heard no news on the incident, and had not been granted permission to visit him since 28 December last year. ([20 January 2010 DVB](#))

14 January 2010

Activists sentenced ‘without evidence’

Three Burmese opposition activists were sentenced yesterday to three years’ with hard labour, despite the prosecution being unable to provide any palpable evidence for their charges, a lawyer said. The three National League for Democracy (NLD) party members were charged under the Unlawful Associations Act for allegedly accepting money from a member of the banned NLD-Liberated Areas (NLD-LA) party. Lawyer Kyaw Ho said that the trial judge, Tin Swe Lin, had given the three, Shwe Gyo, Ma Cho (also known as Myint Myint San) and Sein Hlaing, harsh sentences despite a lack of solid evidence.

“There were neither eye-witnesses nor paperwork evidence that [the three] had accepted money from Eva,” said Kyaw Ho. “We cannot accept such a ruling on legal grounds and we are preparing to appeal.” The three were arrested in March last year and have been kept in detention since, although Kyaw Ho said the time already spent in detention will not be subtracted from their sentence. “There is an official court guideline stating that the amount of time a person has spent in detention during the trial has to be subtracted from the prison term,” he said, adding that this would also be appealed. There had been prior speculation that the three were being targeted for their work in helping political prisoners, although there was no mention of this from Kyaw Ho. ([14 January 2010 DVB](#))

12 January 2010

Death sentences a disgrace: All Monks’ Alliance

The All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA) has urged the Burmese military junta to release two persons who were sentenced to death last week for releasing state secrets to exiled media, according to a statement on Tuesday. The statement said that the death sentences are a disgrace, inappropriate and that they threaten all civil servants. Win Naing Kyaw and Thura Kyaw were sentenced to death for their role in the release of information about a secret trip to North Korea by Burmese generals in connection with the procurement of military weapons. “They are brave people who dare to leak secret information from the military government,” said the statement. The statement said dialogue is the only way to solve the political differences in the country and putting people in prison will not solve the conflict. More than 20 other persons have been arrested in an investigation of the leaked information, which included documents, photographs and video. Their fate is unknown. ([12 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

Detained American’s hearing nears conclusion

With the testimony of a defense witness on Tuesday, Rangoon’s Southern District court concluded witness hearings in the trial against Burmese-born American Kyaw Zaw Lwin, (alias) Nyi Nyi Aung. “Both lawyers will present final arguments on January 22nd, and following that the court will hand down the verdict,” Kyi Win, one of the US citizen’s lawyers, told Mizzima. The naturalized American has been standing trial on charges of fraud, forgery and illegal entry into the country. “I don’t want to speculate on what the court will decide but our position is that the accused is innocent,” Kyi Win said. The international lawyer of Nyi Nyi Aung, Beth Swanke, expanded on the legal position of the defense, claiming the charges are a ‘sham’ and an attempt to frame and imprison the accused, as he is a known pro-democracy activist advocating for democracy and human rights in Burma. The US Embassy in Rangoon, in an email message, told Mizzima that it is closely monitoring the case and “have pursued consular access vigorously from the time of Mr. Lwin's arrest. The United States continues to press the Burmese government to handle his case in accordance with international standards of due process.” “The United States continues to work through diplomatic channels to achieve an overall positive outcome to the case,” Drake Weisert, Assistant Public Affairs Officer at the Embassy, subsequently told Mizzima on Tuesday. “An Embassy consular officer met with Mr. Lwin at Insein Prison on December 28th for one hour. We continue to press for regular consular access,” elaborated Weisert. ([12 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

8 January 2010

Activist sentenced to 71 years in prison

Fifteen political activists from three townships in Mandalay Division, who were held in Obo prison in Mandalay for three months, were given various prison sentences ranging from two years to 71 years on 30 December by a court sitting inside the prison. The special branch of the police arrested the political activists from Myingyan, Nyaung Oo and Kyauk Padaung towns last September and October without giving any reasons and did not allow them to meet their family members during detention. They have been given prison sentences now, a family member who met one of the activists in a prison interview on January 6 said. “Myo Han (Myingyan) was charged in 10 cases and sentenced to 51 years in prison. His elder sister saw him on January 6 but she was not allowed to speak to her brother freely,” a source close to the family member said. Myo Han was given 15 years in prison with cases under the Electronic Act, nine years with three cases under Unlawful Associations Act, two years for inciting people against state security, 14 years with two cases under Printing and Publishing Act, eight years in the with Associations Act and three years under the Television Act, he said quoting his lawyer Myint Thwin. The rest of the activists, U Nandawuntha a.k.a. Aung Naing Oo from Myingyan was sentenced to 71 years, Dr. Wint Thu was given 28 years, Kyi Soe 22 years, Soe Phyo Yarzar Soe 14 years, Hla Myo Kyaw 14 years, Ko Ko Naing 28 years, Than Htike Aung 35 years and Wei Phyo 11 years respectively. They are not only political activists but also volunteers who did relief work for Cyclone Nargis victims. ([8 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

Appeal against death sentence for leaking official secrets

Lawyers plan to file an appeal against the death sentences on two of their clients handed down by the special court in Burma yesterday for allegedly leaking official secrets to the public. The two former high ranking officers of the regime were sentenced to death in a secret trial by the court sitting inside Insein prison for leaking information about tours made by two junta leaders to Russia and North Korea. According to Insein prison sources, the lawyers planned the appeal process today for the two clients, retired Major Win Naing Kyaw and upper division clerk Thura Kyaw from the Foreign Ministry, Europe Affairs Department. “The lawyers Htun Aung, Myo Aung and Khin Maung Myint co-signed on the criminal power to represent retired Major Win Naing Kyaw and they plan to file the appeal today. We also learnt that Thura Kyaw’s lawyer is planning to file an appeal for his client,” a source close to Insein prison told Mizzima. ([8 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

Death sentence for Burmese whistleblowers

Two Burmese government officials accused of leaking sensitive information about secretive diplomatic trips to Russia and North Korea are to be executed, a Rangoon court has announced. Another man, a civilian, was handed a 15-year prison sentence after a two-month trial in a closed court inside Rangoon’s Insein prison. The three are also accused of leaking details of the Burmese government’s secret military tunnel project, which have been obtained by DVB. Win Naing Kyaw, an ex-army major who had worked as a personal assistant for late junta secretary-2, General Tin Oo, was yesterday given the death sentence under Section 3 of the Emergency Provisions Act. He was also charged under the Electronics Act and the Official Secrets Act. Thura Kyaw, also known as Aung Aung, a senior clerk from the Burmese foreign ministry’s European desk, was also given the death sentence under the Emergency Provision Act, while Pyan Sein was sentenced to 15 years’ in prison under the

Electronics Act. Intelligence documents leaked by the three men detailed two senior level governmental visits to North Korea and Russia, as well as North Korea's involvement in the tunnels project. According to the documents, Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has been developing the tunnels since 1996. During the visit to Russia in 2006, Burma's second-in-command, Maung Aye, discussed the procurement of a guided missile system with Moscow's deputy minister of defense, Yury Nikolayevich Baluyevsky. Then in 2008, General Shwe Mann, joint chief of staff of the Burmese army, visited North Korea where he observed tunnel complexes dug deep into the side of mountains that can hold heavy armoury, including chemical weapons. The information about the two trips was allegedly distributed via former government official Aung Linn Htut, who is now living in exile after authorities found the documents stored in his computer hard drive. A number of other army officials were also been detained in connection with the case. ([8 January 2010 DVB](#))

7 January 2010

Prison officials foil observing Independence Day

Prison authorities foiled a plan by political prisoners in Myitkyina prison to observe Independence Day on January 4. Political prisoners, including famous comedian and film actor Zargana planned to observe Burma's Independence Day, commemorating the country's freedom from British rule, on January 4. But the jail officials stopped them. "Officials did not allow the prisoners to salute the national flag on January 4. The political prisoners protested against the ban by shouting slogans," a person who recently met a political prisoner told Mizzima. Opposition political circles said a prison staff member of Corporal rank, who stopped political prisoners from observing Independence Day had served in Insein prison in 1990 and is known to have tortured political prisoners. He was transferred from Puta-O prison to Myitkyina prison in mid-December last year. Political prisoners usually observe such important anniversaries inside prisons in a clandestine manner. Myitkyina prison has a total of 20 political prisoners including Zargana a.k.a. Thura, 88-Generation student leader Myat San, and Thiha Thet Zin from Bogale. Monk U Seindama a.k.a. Swe Min and Aung Myint, are serving their prison sentences here. ([7 January 2010 Mizzima](#))

5 January 2010

Burmese-American makes court appearance in Rangoon

U.S. Embassy officials say a detained Burmese-American has made another court appearance in Burma's main city, Rangoon. A statement from the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon says Burmese-born pro-democracy activist Kyaw Zaw Lwin, also known as Nyi Nyi Aung, appeared in court Tuesday. The statement says a consular officer from the U.S. Embassy attended the hearing. Lwin was arrested in September on his arrival in Burma. Last week a court charged him with forgery and currency violations. U.S. Embassy officials have visited Lwin in jail, and attended his court appearances. The U.S. has called on Burma to follow international standards of due process in the case. His next court appearance is scheduled for 8 January. ([5 January 2010 VOA](#))

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Burma's supreme court heard the final arguments for the appeal of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's latest sentence on 18 January. Diplomats from the British embassy in Rangoon were present at the hearing in which Daw Suu's lawyers refuted the legality of her sentencing last year. The final verdict is expected in February. Also of note in January were the unconfirmed comments by Burmese officials who allegedly claimed that the junta expects to release Daw Suu in November 2010. Given that national elections are rumored to take place in October, a November release will leave the detained NLD ineligible to participate in the elections. Aung San Suu Kyi declared the rumored release date a ploy to influence the supreme court as they make their final decision on Daw Suu's latest appeal. Also of note in January were calls for Daw Suu's immediate release by Japan and the United States.

29 January 2010

Minister's comment is attempt to influence court – Suu Kyi

Detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi said that Burma's Home Minister Major General Maung Oo's alleged comment on her release is an attempt to influence the court, according to a lawyer of hers. Nyan Win, who was allowed to see her yesterday for two and a half hours at her lakeside home in Rangoon to discuss various matters with her, said that she finds the alleged comment of the minister inappropriate. "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said, if it is true that he said that, it is not fair. It is an unfair (biased) comment because the case that concerns him is still to be decided by the Supreme Court. The case is not over yet. This utterance before the court has made a decision implies an attempt to influence the court. It is inappropriate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said." Her response came after it was reported that Maung Oo told local officials at a meeting in upper Burma that the 64-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner is to be released from house arrest in November. ([29 January 2010 DVB](#))

Despite Discomfort, Suu Kyi Stays Busy

Aung San Suu Kyi welcomed her lawyer Nyan Win with an ice-cream. "I made it myself," she said. "Eat it up quickly before it melts." Making ice-cream and baking cakes is one of the ways Suu Kyi fills the long hours of her enforced detention in her dilapidated home on Rangoon's Inya Lake. "She spends a good deal of time working out how to strength the party [the National League for Democracy]," said Nyan Win after a visit to Suu Kyi's home on Thursday. Reporting on the visit, Nyan Win said he found the 64-year-old NLD leader in good health and "vigorous." The lawyer told The Irrawaddy he and Suu Kyi had discussed how to pursue a final appeal against her current term of house arrest, the expansion of the NLD and her frustrated efforts to repair her house. Suu Kyi also spends her time reading Buddhist religious texts, travel and history books, including ones written in French, listening to the radio and watching television which can only receive state-run channels, Nyan Win said. The lawyer said he is allowed to give Suu Kyi censored copies of the magazines Time and Newsweek. He also gave her 20 French books she had requested. "She asked me for many 'international' books," Nyan Win said. "But I am not always allowed to give them to her." However, on Thursday, he managed to present to her a book as a gift from Nobel Economics laureate Joseph Stiglitz who visited Burma in December. During the trip, Stiglitz asked Nyan Win to give his book Globalization and Its Discontent to Suu Kyi. ([29 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

26 January 2010

US Calls for Suu Kyi's immediate release

The United States called Tuesday for Burma to immediately release democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi after signals that the junta could free her following controversial elections. The Nobel laureate's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), said it had heard that the military regime was considering freeing her in November - meeting global demands for her release but only after the election. "The idea that her release will conveniently come after the election is unfortunate," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters. "We will continue to press the Burmese government for her release," he said. He was speaking after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with US Senator Jim Webb, the leading advocate in Congress for engaging the junta. The opposition has been deeply suspicious of the election which the junta plans to hold sometime this year, believing it is a plot to legitimize its rule. ([26 January 2010 DVB](#))

25 January 2010

Suu Kyi 'to be freed in November'

Burma's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will be released from house arrest in November this year, according to Burmese officials who met with a government minister last week. The comments could not be independently verified by Reuters, who reported the news after speaking with two officials who attended a meeting on 21 January with Burma's home minister, Maung Oo. The meeting allegedly took place in Kyaukpadaung, around 350 miles north of the former capital, Rangoon, and was attended by several hundred people. If true, the release would come one month after the rumoured date of Burma's first elections in 20 years. According to information leaked from a meeting between a government official and the head of a prominent Japanese charity, elections will take place in October, most likely on the 10th. Releasing Suu Kyi in November would fit with allegations by critics of the junta that her trial was a deliberate ploy to keep her out of the political arena whilst polling is taking place. This is despite international calls for the junta to release all political prisoners prior to that date.

A number of clauses in the controversial 2008 constitution, such as the prohibition on former prisoners running for office, and a similar ban on people who were or are married to non-Burmese, would however prevent Suu Kyi from participating, even if freed. ([25 January 2010 DVB](#))

19 January 2010

Western envoys at Suu Kyi hearing

Diplomats from the British embassy in Rangoon attended the court hearing for Aung San Suu Kyi's latest appeal on 18 January, in which lawyers refuted the legality of her sentencing last year. "We were there to show our support for Suu Kyi's legal team," British embassy spokesperson Ruth Bradley-Jones told DVB, adding that they had been invited by the defence lawyers. The embassy staff had been granted permission to attend by Rangoon authorities and were told that they would be given no special attention, although Bradley-Jones said the media presence outside the Burma courtroom after the hearing finished was significant. ([19 January 2010 DVB](#))

18 January 2010

Burmese court hears final Suu Kyi appeal

Burma's supreme court heard final arguments on Monday against the extended house arrest of detained pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer said. The hearing, which took place on 18 January at the top Rangoon court, where both sides gave arguments, lasted more than three hours, according to Suu Kyi's main lawyer Kyi Win. He said a decision was expected within a month. "We expect them to accept our arguments and after that release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he told AFP. Daw is a term of respect in Burma. "The law is completely on our side," he said, adding that they argued her conviction was unlawful because it was based on regulations in the country's now-defunct 1974 constitution. If the appeal is rejected, it is thought that Suu Kyi and her lawyers would have to appeal directly to the military government to try to get the conviction overturned. The Nobel peace laureate, who is detained at her lakeside mansion in Rangoon, did not attend the court and journalists were barred, although the British ambassador and another embassy official were seen going into the hearing. ([18 January 2010 DVB](#))

Japan calls for Suu Kyi's release

Japan's foreign minister has urged Burma's military rulers to release detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, adding that aid could be stepped up if elections this year are free. Katsuya Okada met with his Burmese counterpart, Nyan Win, on Sunday on the sidelines of a gathering of foreign ministers from Asia and Latin America. According to the Japanese foreign ministry website, Okada said that Suu Kyi and Burma's 2,100 political prisoners should be released prior to the elections, although the Burmese junta is yet to announce a date. ([18 January 2010 DVB](#))

Suu Kyi meets Burma junta liaison officer

Burma's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi met the ruling junta's liaison officer Friday, officials and her party said, in the latest sign of dialogue between the two sides. A Burmese official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said labour minister Aung Kyi, the government's liaison with Suu Kyi, met her for 30 minutes at a state-run guesthouse in Rangoon. He gave no details of their discussions. It is the fourth meeting between the pair since the beginning of October and comes after the country's supreme court agreed last month to hear a final appeal against her house arrest. "We do not know details about the meeting but we expect future talks. There are several things to discuss," said Khin Maung Swe, a spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). He said the NLD hoped the junta would allow members of the party's central executive committee to meet Suu Kyi at a later date. ([18 January 2010 DVB](#))

12 January 2010

Suu Kyi meets with lawyers to discuss appeal

Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was on Tuesday allowed to meet with her lawyers to discuss her upcoming appeal against the 18-month extension of her house arrest, as well as to address an objection by her brother to repairs to her lakeside home, according to Nyan Win, one of her lawyers. Nyan Win told The Irrawaddy on Tuesday that he and another lawyer, Kyi Win, met with Suu Kyi from 2 p.m to 4 p.m. "First, we discussed the

legal details regarding the three cases of appeal which the Supreme Court is to review on Jan. 18,” said Nyan Win. “We have also submitted a letter to Rangoon municipality about an objection over house repairs, asking for a photocopy of that objection letter from the municipal office,” he added. Suu Kyi's lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court on Dec. 21 after the Rangoon Division Court upheld the conviction in August for briefly sheltering an uninvited American in her home last year. The Supreme Court agreed to review her most recent house arrest extension. ([12 January 2009 Irrawaddy](#))

2 January 2010

Burma's High Court Sets Date for Suu Kyi Trial

A lawyer for Burma's democracy leader says the Supreme Court will review Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal against her house arrest on January 18. Lawyer Kyi Win told VOA (Burmese service) Saturday the court will hear the final arguments of both the defense and prosecution. Aung San Suu Kyi is challenging a lower court decision upholding her sentence of 18 more months of house arrest. The Nobel laureate's legal team says it is not lawful to extend her house arrest because the decision was based on provisions from the 1974 Constitution, which is no longer in force. Aung San Suu Kyi can not participate in next year's elections if she is under house arrest. The vote will be Burma's first elections in two decades. ([2 January 2010 VOA](#))

Key International Developments

2010 started with the military junta confirming that national elections will take place in 2010, yet did not set a specific date for the elections, which are rumored to be planned for September. The junta also urged Burmese citizens to make ‘correct choices’ when voting. Burma’s foreign minister, Nyan Win, pledged that the elections would be free while dining with ASEAN leaders on 13 January.

Washington-based NGO Freedom House labeled Burma one of the worst countries in the world for ‘freedom’ in their annual report, released 12 January. In a letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Hong Kong based Asian Human Rights Commission claimed that torture in Burma is “now more widespread than at any time in recent decades”, and detailed the gruesome practices used on prisoners in Burma. Human Rights Watch also documented Burma’s deteriorating human rights record in its World Report 2010.

Following the first few months of the United States’ newly enacted ‘engagement’ policy with the Burmese military regime, the admitted their impatience with the junta, stating that it needs clear steps towards reform, including the release of NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

29 January 2010

Release of political prisoners and national reconciliation urgent: France

France continues to call for the immediate release of detained Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 political activists as well as for national reconciliation prior to the 2010 election, according to a statement released by France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Jan. 27. The statement said France reacted with firmness to

the further sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi on August 11, 2009 and the European Union toughened its sanctions. The statement said France “continues to call for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and of all the Burmese political prisoners. This is an essential condition for the credibility of the elections planned by the authorities this year. “France would like the Burmese government to make concrete gestures in support of the national reconciliation process which would include the opposition and the ethnic minorities,” the statement said. “This is particularly urgent prior to the elections planned by the authorities,” the statement said, adding that it should not be forgotten that Suu Kyi was deprived of her liberty for “14 of the last 20 years” and the numbers of political prisoners are estimated to be “approximately 2000.” ([29 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

27 January 2010

UN Special Rapporteur to visit Burma

The UN human rights special rapporteur for Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, will visit the country from Feb. 14 to 20. When he made a number of requests last year to visit the country for the second time in one year, the regime said the timing was not right. He will make a report on his findings to the UN Human Rights Council in March, according to the UN Human Rights office in Thailand. Quintana has asked the authorities to meet with the detained pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and leaders of ethnic cease-fire groups during his visit, according to an interview he gave to a Burmese radio station on Tuesday. He has also asked to visit Arakan State to study the human rights situation there. In his report to the UN last year, Quintana called for the release of all 2,156 political prisoners before the 2010 election in order to ensure national reconciliation and a transition to democracy. ([27 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

22 January 2010

Burma junta ‘worse than cyclone Nargis’

Human rights violations by the ruling junta in Burma have caused more damage than cyclone Nargis, which struck in 2008 and left 140,000 people dead, a top Philippines senator has said. Aquilino Pimentel, who is also a senior member of the world's leading body of parliamentarians, the Inter Parliamentary Union's (IPU), said that the devastation wrought by Nargis pushed people to think that it “was the worst thing that could happen to Myanmar [Burma]. But actually... not. It was rather the deprivation of the rights of the people by a ruling junta,” he told AFP. The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was roundly condemned for its slow reaction to the cyclone and for initially refusing offers of overseas aid for the estimated 2.4 million people left destitute. But that criticism fed into wider outrage at the military government, who continued to export mass quantities of rice in the cyclone’s aftermath despite warnings from aid groups that millions were going hungry. Journalists were also barred from entering the cyclone-struck Irrawaddy delta, while a number of Burmese reporters were handed lengthy prison sentences for providing images and footage to foreign media. Pimentel’s comments mirror a similar outburst from the ruling junta in the weeks following the cyclone, with the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper leading with a story on the “despicable” reporting of the cyclone by foreign media, under the title “The enemy who is more destructive than Nargis”. “Nothing much seems to be happening in terms of advancing the cause of democracy in Myanmar,” Pimentel said,

adding that the 14 opposition parliamentarians elected in 1990, which includes Suu Kyi, must be freed. ([22 January 2010 DVB](#))

Chinese influence in Burma increases: Webb

Chinese influence in Burma has grown steadily at a time when the US has cut off virtually all economic and diplomatic relations, said Sen. Webb, the chair of the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “Chinese arms sales and other military aid has exceeded \$3 billion. Other public and private Chinese aid has been in the form of billions in interest-free loans, grants, concessional loans and debt relief. There have also been numerous low-interest loans,” he said during a Senate hearing on Thursday. “As only one example of China’s enormous investment reach, within the next decade or sooner, Beijing is on track to exclusively transfer to its waiting refineries both in-coming oil and locally tapped natural gas via a 2,380-kilometer pipeline, a \$30 billion deal. All the while, China has encouraged within Burma an intrinsic suspicion of US motives in the region.” During Suu Kyi’s conversation with Webb last year, one of the topics of conversation was China’s influence within the Burmese regime. However, Suu Kyi told Webb that she rejected such terminology with regard to China, and she wanted Burma to be on good terms with all its neighboring countries as well as the international community at large, according to Suu Kyi’s lawyer Nyan Win. “She said China is Burma’s neighbor and wants to be a good friend of Burma. She said she did not see China as a fearful influence,” Nyan Win told The Irrawaddy in August. ([22 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

21 January 2010

State-backed attacks on activists grow

A leading rights watchdog has reported a global rise in the number of state-sanctioned abuses against “rights defenders”, fueled in part by the inability of the rights movement to protect victims. The annual report, by New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), said that attacks on human rights monitors “are not limited to authoritarian governments like Burma and China”, but are now rampant in countries such as Russia, Sri Lanka, Burundi and Afghanistan. In the case of Burma, despite growing calls for the ruling junta to be investigated for war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2009, “no government has yet taken the lead in either initiative at the UN”, HRW said. The report also expressed concern about the regime’s refusal to allow prison access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), amid reports that detained US citizen Kyaw Zaw Lwin, a prominent exiled Burmese rights campaigner, was being tortured.

According to the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP), the junta imprisoned 231 activists, lawyers, journalists and politicians in 2009, many of whom were sentenced on or around the two-year anniversary of the September 2007 monk-led uprising. Kenneth Roth, executive director of HRW, said that the attacks “might be seen as a perverse tribute to the human rights movement, but that doesn’t mitigate the danger. Under various pretexts, abusive governments are attacking the very foundations of the human rights movement.” He went on to criticize US president Barack Obama’s “incomplete translation” of improved rhetoric “into policy and practice”. Despite increasing attention from Washington, Burma has however been labeled a “boutique issue” for the US, which is under heavy pressure to transform its image in the Middle East, whilst Obama deflects growing discontentment over his domestic performance. ([21 January 2010 DVB](#))

19 January 2010

US ‘needs clear steps’ on Burma reform

The US yesterday signaled a growing impatience with the Burmese regime after complaining that it had received a “mixed bag” of results following its decision to engage with the pariah state. Washington’s top Asia-Pacific official, Kurt Campbell, also said that a follow-up meeting to the one he held with the junta in November last year was in the cards. “We have had some follow-on direct interactions with Burmese authorities, and I think we’re going to be looking at a subsequent set of discussions in the near future,” he told a news conference. Only if key demands are met, such as the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, and evidence that elections this year are free and fair, will the US consider lifting sanctions, secretary of state Hillary Clinton said. Campbell did note some progress, such as the meeting last month between Suu Kyi and several National League for Democracy (NLD) party members, but added that ongoing persecution of ethnic groups by the junta would need to be addressed. ([19 January 2010 DVB](#))

18 January 2010

Burma torture now ‘more widespread’

Torture in Burma is “now more widespread than at any time in recent decades”, according to an open letter sent by an Asian rights group to the UN’s torture rapporteur. The letter, signed by the executive director of the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), claims that the spread of torture was partly a result of the Supreme Court in Burma making exemptions to rulings which would have forbidden the use of evidence gained from torture, thereby setting precedence, or giving orders, that allow the practice. “The current Supreme Court of Myanmar [Burma] has enabled their use and has thereby encouraged the practice of torture by virtue of a number of orders,” said executive director Basil Fernando. The letter, addressed to Dr Manfred Novak, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, also details the gruesome practices meted out to a number of prisoners; torture it describes as “grave” and “extreme”. These were used on Dr Wint Thu and eight others who had lead prayers for democracy, the letter said. It also detailed the shocking treatment of a monk, who was “forced...to kneel on sharp gravel while an officer jumped up and down on his calves. If he didn’t give him the answers that they wanted then they hit him on the head with a wooden rod.” Bo Kyi, joint secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP), doubted however the role of the Supreme Court in encouraging torture. “It is not related to the supreme court because the Supreme Court has no power; everything is under the control of military intelligence. There is no rule of law; there is no separation of power.” He further questioned whether torture was used for gaining evidence, arguing instead that “it is used for gaining revenge”. In effect then the internal legality or otherwise of torture is neither here nor there, and the Burmese government rather uses brutality as a punishment and deterrent, not necessarily in order to gain intelligence. Worryingly, Fernando also adds that torture is difficult to remove from a system once it becomes common practice, and that “whatever happens in Myanmar in coming years, the use of torture will remain endemic.” ([18 January 2010 DVB](#))

14 January 2010

Burma pledges free election

Burma's foreign minister has told Southeast Asian counterparts that promised elections would be held this year and would be fair, the ASEAN secretary general said on Thursday. Surin Pitsuwan said the military-ruled state's foreign minister, Nyan Win, made the comments at a dinner on Wednesday in Vietnam with his counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). "That was done last night and it was assured that it will be this year, and it will be free, fair and credible," Mr Surin told reporters on the sidelines of an ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting. "No date has been set, but everything is moving on course. That's what we were told." Mr Surin said the ASEAN ministers "have expressed their high hope that the issue of Burma will be resolved this year and that we can move on to the new era of ASEAN relations and cooperation with the international community." ([14 January 2010 DVB](#))

13 January 2010

Burma freedom is 'worst of worst'

A Washington-based NGO has labeled Burma one of the worst countries in the world for 'freedom' in an annual report, released yesterday. Burma ranks alongside nine other countries in the "worst of the worst" category in Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World 2010' report, which includes Libya, Tibet, China, Eritrea, North Korea and Equatorial Guinea. The organization, funded largely by the US government and the conservative Bradley Foundation, has been producing the report for nearly forty years, which "examines the ability of individuals to exercise their political and civil rights in 194 countries and 14 territories around the world." Determinants of 'freedom' include whether "people's political choices are free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group". It also includes a base alignment system, with countries ranked either 'free', 'partially free' or 'not free'. This is based on a score system for civil liberties and political freedom, with seven being the lowest and one the highest. Burma predictably scores seven on both counts. ([13 January 2010 DVB](#))

Clinton, Okada discuss Burma

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada discussed how to influence the Burmese military junta to move toward democracy and to release Aung San Suu Kyi, the popular pro-democracy leader, from detention. They provided no details of their discussion at a joint press conference in Honolulu on Wednesday. Before the meeting, a spokesperson said, "I think it is a broad review of Burma and how we can engage Burma to encourage the junta to change its policies, to change its tactics, to welcome an opposition, to allow the development of a democratic society." He said the 2010 election and Suu Kyi would also likely be discussed. ([13 January 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

4 January 2010

Burma junta confirms election

Military-ruled Burma's junta chief urged people on Monday to make "correct choices" at national elections to be held this year, in a message to mark the country's 62nd independence anniversary. Senior General Than Shwe said his seven-step "road map" to

democracy was "the sole process for transition" in the annual message which was read out by another general at a ceremony in the remote administrative capital Naypyidaw. "Plans are under way to hold elections in a systematic way this year. In that regard, the entire people have to make correct choices," Than Shwe's message said. Critics of Burma's regime say the polls are a sham designed to cement the ruling generals' grip over the nation, especially as opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi recently had her house arrest sentence extended beyond 2010. A date has still not been announced for the elections, which will be the first since 1990 when the junta refused to recognise the landslide win of the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Suu Kyi. ([4 January 2010 DVB](#))

Opinion Section

Opinion editorials in January largely focused on 2010 national elections and the widespread skepticism that has already been generated in response to the elections and national reconciliation.

Than Shwe and the Waiting Game – by Aung Zaw (27 January 2010)

Online at: http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=17667

Two Cases Highlight Burma's Unfair Legal System – by Arkar Moe (26 January 2010)

Online at: http://www.irrawaddymedia.com/article.php?art_id=17659

Looking for an Election in Burma's Political Fog – by Ba Kaung (7 January 2010)

Online at: http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=17540

Burma will struggle for attention in 2010 – by Francis Wade (6 January 2010)

Online at: <http://english.dvb.no/news.php?id=3201>