



**Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)**

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

## **Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for April, 2010**



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## MONTHLY CHRONOLOGY – APRIL 2010

### Summary of current situation

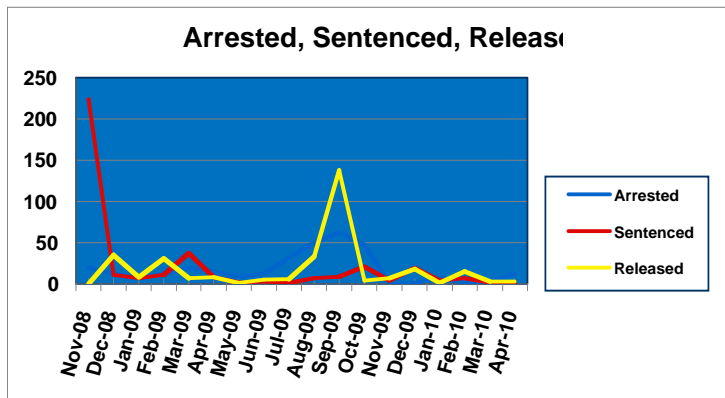
There are a total of **2,199** political prisoners in Burma. This is an overall increase of 13 in comparison to last month's figure of 2,186. In April, 12 activists were arrested and 3 political prisoners were released. The AAPP also received information about activists who were arrested and released before April 2010, and this retroactive information explains why there is actually an overall increase of 13 this month.

These include:

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Monks	253
Members of Parliament	12
Students	282
Women	178
NLD members	428
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	33
Ethnic nationalities	210
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	20
Teachers	29
Media activists	41
Lawyers	12
In poor health	142

Since the protests in August 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **1,174** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

## Monthly Trend Analysis



During the month of April 2010, at least **12** activists were arrested, **2** were sentenced, **1** was transferred, and **3** were released. At least **142** 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 continuing fallout resulting from the passage of last month's election laws, which most observers expect to result in the dissolution of the National League for Democracy (NLD), highlighted the month of April. News related to political prisoners, specifically, was fairly sparse this month, though it is expected that the dissolution of the NLD and upcoming national elections will have an enormous impact on the political prisoner landscape going forward. Specifically, analysts expect the junta to target legal action against former NLD members once the legal protection of their party is no longer in place. In response to the impending abolition of their party, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders have separately filed lawsuits with the chief justice and Supreme Court, respectively, calling the election laws unjust and unfair.

Significant international outcry resulted from the election laws and the impending dissolution of the NLD, with numerous ASEAN lawmakers calling for sanctions against Burma as well as their potential expulsion from the regional body. Additionally, the European Union decided to extend sanctions against Burma as a result of their failure to implement democratic reforms.

In April, a bomb that ripped through New Year's celebrations in Rangoon resulted in the deaths of 10 people, and wounded 170 more. AAPP expresses its deepest condolences for the victims of the bombings, and is concerned that the bombings might lead to an increase in the harassment and arrest of political dissidents, as has occurred in the past. Several people were arrested in April in connection to the bombing.

Prominent DVB journalist Hla Hla Win's appeal to the Mandalay Division Supreme Court was rejected in late April, while imprisoned blogger Nay Phone Latt won the prestigious PEN/Barbara Goldsmith award for his role in disseminating news during the

2007 Saffron Revolution and was also named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by TIME magazine.

## **Treatment of prisoners and their families**

88 Generation member Ko Mya Aye was reported to have been denied access to health care in April. He is suffering from a serious heart ailment as well as hypertension and gastric problems while serving time on death row. Additionally, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was briefly hospitalized in mid April in response to temporarily low blood pressure and concerns with regard to her heart.

## **Prisoners Released**

April brought the release of 3 political prisoners. NLD leaders Aung Khin Bo, Chairman of Bogalay Township, and Mi Mi Sein, NLD Joint Secretary, were both were released on 9 April following completion of their prison terms.

## **National League for Democracy**

There are at least 428 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) currently detained. April began the unofficial countdown to the legal dissolution of the NLD, which is expected to occur in the first half of May. NLD leaders promised to continue to the “democratic struggle” following the disbanding of the nation’s oldest and most deeply entrenched political party, while also reflecting on the achievements and history of the party over the past 40 years. NLD leaders also brought a lawsuit before the chief justice, calling the election laws which brought about the demise of the party “unjust and unfair”. Observers believe that the official dissolution of the party could provide legal justification for further imprisonment of NLD members.

### **21 April 2010**

#### **Final days at NLD party headquarters**

The red and white sign in front of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), headquarters in Rangoon will disappear in the next 15 days. As a political party, the NLD gained the support of many people from different walks of life for more than 20 years. However, the party will be dissolved in May because of its decision on March 29 not to register as a political party and compete in the election this year. For now, the ground floor of the headquarters is as lively and busy as before. Tables are occupied by members. Some have come to the office regularly for 20 years, working without a salary. Some of the workers have been imprisoned by the regime only to return upon their release. The party has contributed 5,000 to 8,000 kyat (about US \$5-8) to each political prisoner every month for 10 years. Currently, there are more than

2,100 political prisoners in prisons throughout the country. Other current party activities include cleaning water wells damaged by Cyclone Nargis in areas where people still have difficulty finding access to drinkable water. Such projects will be harder to undertake in the future, according to NLD sources. "I am not happy with the fact that our decision will lead to the end of our organization," said Tin Oo, the NLD vice chairman. "On the other hand, I am proud of others and myself for making such a dignified decision." Quoting Aung San Suu Kyi, who said the NLD would not be destroyed even if it was dissolved, he said it would continue its activities and struggle for democracy. Veteran NLD leader Win Tin also said that the party has a future. "Some say the NLD may become an underground organization if it doesn't re-register," he said. "We will continue our activities in peaceful and non-violent ways." In a letter to the public, the party affirmed that under the leadership of Suu Kyi it would continue its aims and objectives. It's clear the party's social work will go on. ([21 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

## **9 April 2010**

### **Two NLD township leaders freed**

Following the completion of their prison terms, the Burmese military junta released two National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders of Bogalay Township. The released political prisoners are Aung Khin Bo, Chairman of Bogalay Township (Irrawaddy Division) organization committee of the NLD and Mi Mi Sein, the Joint Secretary. They were freed on the morning of 9 April. Aung Khin Bo was released from Thayet prison and Mi Mi Sein was released from Insein prison. "U Aung Khin Bo was released this morning. He is on his way and will be in Rangoon office tomorrow," a party spokesman, Ohn Kyaing, said. A total of 300 prisoners were released on April 9. "I was released at 11 am. They released me because I completed my prison term," Mi Mi Sein told Mizzima. Aung Khin Bo and Mi Mi Sein participated in the Bogalay market protest against mounting fuel and commodity prices and were imprisoned in September 2007. They were charged with violation of Article 505 (b) of the Penal Code upsetting public tranquility and violation of Article 143 of the Penal Code - unlawful assembly and sentenced two years and six months. "I was ill in prison and needed medical treatment. I arrived in the prison on September 10, 2009 and was in the hospital of the Insein prison. On September 18, they told me if I signed bond 401, I would be free. I refused. I believe that we were sentenced even though we did not flout the law so I refused to sign the bond and therefore I had to serve the full prison term," Mi Mi Sein said. ([9 April 2010 Mizzima](#))

### **NLD takes Than Shwe lawsuit to chief justice**

Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), wrote on Thursday to the chief justice in Naypyidaw, Burma's capital, with a request that its lawsuit against military junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe is dealt with through the correct legal channels. On March 23, three NLD leaders—Nyan Win, Tin Oo and Aung Shwe—filed a lawsuit with the Supreme Court in an attempt to sue the chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, for issuing "unjust and unfair" election laws. According to the NLD, an official at the Supreme Court handed the

documents back to the complainants, responding that the court does not have the power to handle the case. Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Thursday, NLD spokesman Nyan Win said, "According to the high court manual, they cannot refuse a lawsuit like that. It is unlawful. If they refuse, they must give cause. That is why we sent a letter to the chief justice." The NLD pointed to an election law that prohibits its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, from participating in the general election because she is currently under house arrest. One of the five election-related laws released on March 8 prohibits anyone convicted of a crime or serving a sentence from being a member of a political party, and instructs parties to expel convicted members or face de-registration. The party said it is calling for a review and amendment of the laws. According to her lawyers, Suu Kyi said that forcing any political prisoners from their parties and banning them from voting is a double punishment. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi has been in detention for 14 of the past 20 years. ([9 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

## **6 April 2010**

### **NLD apologizes for failed struggle**

Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), apologized to its supporters across the country on Tuesday for "the unsuccessful struggle for democracy" that it had waged for more than 20 years. The public apology came in a three-page statement titled "Appeal to the Public," which was released on Tuesday only in Burmese language. "The aim of the statement is to officially apologize to the public for our failed policies in the struggle for democracy," said Nyan Win, the main spokesperson for the NLD. "Nonetheless, we want to inform everyone that we will continue in our struggle to bring democracy to Burma." The statement included seven points describing the democratic reforms and policies that the NLD had attempted, as well as the persecution the party has faced during its 22-year campaign to bring about a civilian government in the country. It highlighted the military regime's refusal to recognize the NLD victory in the 1990 election, and the threats, arrests and intimidation its members, including party leader Aung San Suu Kyi, had been subjected to over the years. ([6 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

## **April 7, 2010**

### **NLD Mandalay Office Closed**

The National League for Democracy (NLD) Mandalay Division office closed on Saturday after local authorities applied pressure on the landlord, a member of the division's organizing committee said on Wednesday. He told The Irrawaddy that the pressure to close the office began after the March 29 decision by the NLD not to register as a political party, and thereby face dissolution. "The authorities put pressure on our landlord not to provide her three-story house anymore, and they asked her to comply as soon as possible," said Myo Naing, a member of the Mandalay organizing committee. All NLD offices across the country were closed by the authorities after the Depayin massacre in May 2003. The offices were only allowed to reopen on March 10, in preparation for the 2010 election, but only weeks later NLD members voted to not take part in the national

election, citing its lack of fairness and inclusiveness, and saying that barring of party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners from party membership and voting was undemocratic. Myo Naing said the Mandalay office first opened in 2002 and the contents of the office have been moved to the home of a NLD member, who is also now under pressure from authorities. On Monday, the NLD executive committee in Rangoon organized a 17-member management committee to handle arrangements for the party's possessions after it is dissolved, said Tin Oo, the NLD vice-chairman. ([http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=18233](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18233))

## **5 April 2010**

### **NLD members will continue 'democratic struggle'**

Members of Burma's opposition National League for Democracy will continue "the democratic struggle" after the party's expected dissolution on May 7, veteran NLD official Win Tin said on Monday. "With Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as our leader, our party members will continue the democratic struggle," said Win Tin. Win Tin and two other CEC members, Ohn Kyaing and Han Thar Myint, proposed that party members across the country, with Suu Kyi and NLD Vice-Chairman Tin Oo as their nucleus, should create a network and continue the democratic struggle. But CEC member Khin Maung Swe said he rejected the proposal "because it will take us on a confrontation line with the regime." At its first meeting since March 29, the party's central executive committee also decided on Monday to form a 17-member committee to oversee the party's property and finances. "This is to prepare for the party if something happens after May 7," NLD spokesman Nyan Win said. It is still unclear what the party will do after May 7. NLD sources say some party officials will probably form their own political parties to contest the election. ([5 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

## **88 Generation Students**

There are at least 40 members of the 88 Generation Students group currently in detention. Concern mounted in April with regard to the health status of imprisoned 88 Generation member Ko Mya Aye, who has been denied medical treatment while on death row. Mya Aye is suffering from a serious heart ailment in addition to hypertension and gastric problems.

## **29 April 2010**

### **Burmese political prisoner Ko Mya Aye denied medical treatment – now on death row**

Ko Mya Aye, one of the leaders of 88 Generation Students Group, which led protests in 1988 and again in 2007, is being denied access to proper medical treatment he urgently needs for a heart condition. On 9th of April he was moved from Loikaw Prison in Karenni State to Taungyi Prison in Shan State. Both prisons are many miles from emergency medical care he will need if he has another heart attack, and too far away for

family to make regular visits. Ko Mya Aye appears to be suffering from angina which has recently become unstable causing heart failure and requiring urgent medical treatment. He is also suffering from hypertension and gastric problems. He needs proper medical tests that can only be done in Rangoon, and will probably require an angioplasty operation or coronary artery bypass graft. So far there have been none of the required medical tests or operations. Another angina attack without access to emergency medical care would be very serious. Taungyi prison is 450 miles away from Rangoon and 16 miles away from Taungyi City. The distance from the main prison entrance to the prison itself is about 4 miles. Ko Mya Aye is also being held in conditions which are making his health condition much worse. On his arrival in the jail he was put in a cell which is for death row prisoners, and denied any exercise. There is no toilet or running water in the cell and he has to go toilet in an open field by the prison with no privacy. "Ko Mya Aye should be released immediately so he can get the urgent medical treatment that he needs," said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. "If the authorities will not release him, at the very least they should allow him proper medical care." Burma's generals systematically use the denial of medical treatment to mistreat and abuse political prisoners. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) estimates that 137 political prisoners are in poor health as a result of harsh medical conditions or being denied proper medical care. (29 April 2010 Burma Campaign UK)

## **Ethnic Nationalities**

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

### **1 April 2010**

#### **Mon alliance will not take part in election**

A political alliance representing Burma's Mon community has decided not to take part in the planned general election. The decision, taken on March 30 at a meeting of a 15-member committee in the Mon State capital, Moulmein, leaves the Mon with no representation in the election. The alliance includes former members of the central committee of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), an armed group that signed a ceasefire agreement with the junta in 1995, members of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) and other respected Mon community leaders. The MNDF announced last week that it will not contest the election because the junta's election law is unjust. The NMSP announced last year its opposition to participation in the election. The party has called for a review of the 2008 constitution, saying it doesn't protect ethnic or democratic rights. ([1 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

## **Monks**

There are at least 253 monks currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.



## **Cyclone Nargis Volunteers**

There are currently at least 20 Cyclone Nargis volunteers currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Journalists, Bloggers and Writers**

There are currently at least 41 journalists held in prison. In late April, the appeal of imprisoned DVB reporter Hla Hla Win was rejected by a Magway Division court. An appeal to the Mandalay Division Supreme Court is expected. Also in April, imprisoned blogger Nay Phone Latt won the prestigious PEN/Barbara Goldsmith award for his role in disseminating news during the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

### **29 April 2010**

#### **DVB reporter's appeal rejected**

A reporter for a non-profit media organisation lost her appeal in the Magway Division Court against a jail term of more than a quarter of a century handed down in Pakokku, her lawyer said yesterday. Hla Hla Win, video reporter for the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), based in Norway, was sentenced to 27 years in Myitkyina prison in Kachin State. Oral arguments of lawyers from both sides on her appeal against the decision handed down in a Pakokku court were heard on April 5 and the court rejected her appeal yesterday. "The court said upheld the decision of the Pakokku court, thus rejecting the appeal," Shwe Hla, Hla Hla Win's lawyer said. Hla Hla Win was sentenced 20 years for violating the draconian Electronics Act and the Video Act, 505 (b) and seven years for violating the Import-Export Act, 5 (1) (for riding an unlicensed motorcycle). Her lawyer said he would lodge an appeal with the Mandalay Division Supreme Court. "My client did not commit any illegal act. So, the decisions of the inferior courts are unfair," he said. "After we have copied the judgments of the inferior courts, we will try to get the deserved legal right. We will point out that the inferior courts' decisions were unlawful, and continue pursuing legal proceedings in this case." ([29 April 2010 Mizzima](#))

#### **Nay Phone Latt cracks TIME magazine's 100 most influential list**

TIME released its "TIME 100" list on 29 April, which included Nay Phone Latt, the blogger imprisoned in Burma who this year won the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award. Salman Rushdie writes: "When the junta there cracked down on Buddhist-monk-led demonstrations in 2007 and restricted press coverage, Nay Phone Latt's blog was a go-to source for international journalists. For this, he was arrested and is serving 12 years." ([29 April 2010 MediaBistro](#))

### **28 April 2010**

### **Burmese blogger wins top US award**

Imprisoned Burmese blogger Nay Phone Latt, whose role in disseminating news of the September 2007 uprising in Burma won him international applaud, has received the prestigious PEN/Barbara Goldsmith award. Speaking prior the award ceremony last night in New York, PEN president Kwame Anthony Appiah said that Nay Phone Latt, who was arrested in January 2008 and sentenced to 20 years in prison, “represents a younger generation of Burmese who are longing for freedom and willing to pay the cost of speaking out in its defense”. According to news alerts following his sentencing, the 29-year-old was arrested for posting satirical cartoons of Burmese junta chief Than Shwe on his blog. The charge of “causing public alarm” accounted for two of 20 years he is to spend in prison. He was also a prolific writer, and posted regular articles during the so-called Saffron Revolution in 2007 that partly compensated for the media blackout enforced by the regime. Burma has one of the most draconian media environments in the world, and journalists are regularly given painfully long sentences. PEN, which advocates for global freedom of expression, is the world’s oldest human rights organisation and the oldest international literary organisation.

## **Women**

There are at least 178 women currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network**

There are at least 33 members of the Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Labour Activists**

There are currently at least 36 labour activists held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Students**

There are currently at least 282 students held in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Lawyers**

There are currently at least 12 lawyers detained in prison.

There is no news to report in April.

## **Individual Activists**

There is no news to report in April.

## **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**

April proved to be a trying month for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. The month began with Daw Suu offering her gratitude to the NLD for refusing to take part in the upcoming national elections in response to election laws, which mandated her expulsion from the party as a prerequisite for eligibility. These election laws led Daw Suu to file a lawsuit in late April with Burma's Supreme Court in an attempt to prevent the dissolution of her party for failing to expel the detained nobel laureate. In mid April, health concerns began to mount as Daw Suu was briefly hospitalized following concerns over her heart and temporary low blood pressure. Further information with regard to her current state of health is unavailable.

### **30 April 2010**

#### **Suu Kyi fights party disolution**

Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi filed a lawsuit with Burma's Supreme Court Thursday in an attempt to prevent the dissolution of her party under a controversial new election law. The detained pro-democracy icon's lawyer said two suits were submitted against the top junta leader Senior General Than Shwe, one on behalf of Suu Kyi herself and the other by her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The Nobel peace laureate asked the court to annul the part of the election law that would have forced the party to oust its detained leader in order to participate in the first polls to be held in two decades. In addition, the lawsuits asked for the formation of a parliament made up of lawmakers who won in 1990 elections, her lawyer Kyi Win told reporters. The Supreme Court is expected to announce Friday whether it will accept the request to hear the matter, he said. ([30 April 2010 DVB](#))

#### **Suu Kyi's house plan approved**

Rangoon municipal authorities have given the go-ahead for renovations on the house-cum-prison of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Her lawyer, Nyan Win, said that Suu Kyi's representative, Htin Kyaw, was informed by the municipal

department yesterday morning that the renovation had been approved. He said that lawyers had requested a meeting with authorities to discuss the renovation. Suu Kyi's estranged brother, Aung San Oo, had claimed part-ownership of the house, which was handed down from their mother, Daw Khin Gyi, and tried to block the work, but courts threw out his case. Judges argued that his status as a US citizen made it illegal for him to own property in Burma. ([30 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **26 April 2010**

### **Suu Kyi wades into Thailand crisis**

Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has drawn the ire of Thai politicians after claiming that the country's instability resulted from a constitution that was drawn up by the military. She reportedly told lawyer Nyan Win that Burma "need not look very far" to see that "a new government coming to power under a constitution drawn up by the military will never be stable," according to AFP. "We just see Thailand. [Former prime minister] Thaksin was an elected person. The military seized the power from an elected person. The constitution was drawn up by the military." "After that, what happened with the first [government]? It was not stable," she said of the short-lived administration that followed the coup. "This was a result of the constitution being written by the military." In an interview with the Thailand-based Irrawaddy magazine today, however, Nyan Win said that Suu Kyi had in fact not mentioned Thaksin's name during their conversation. Suu Kyi's comments have angered the upper echelons of the Thai government, whose grip on power is now looking tenuous. ([26 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **12 April 2010**

### **Suu Kyi triggers health concerns**

Detained Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been suffering from low blood pressure that required treatment from her family doctor, lawyer Kyi Win said. According to two separate government officials quoted by AFP, however, the 64-year-old was briefly taken to hospital on Sunday over concerns about her heart, but discharged 45 minutes later. "When I went to see her on Wednesday with U Nyan Win, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said her blood pressure has dropped and she suffers a bit of dizziness," said Kyi Win. "When she told us that she had a little dizziness, we went to Special Branch [SB] police to get help as soon as we came out. SB took action straight away and they informed Saya Tin Myo Win [Suu Kyi's doctor] and he went to see her the following day." Neither the government nor Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party has issued any official statement regarding her health. After the 2003 Depayin massacre, in which a government-backed mob attacked and killed 70 people traveling in a convoy with Suu Kyi, she has been occasionally suffering from low blood pressure, dehydration and loss of appetite. ([12 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **8 April 2010**

### **Suu Kyi thanks party for election boycott**

Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has thanked her National League for Democracy (NLD) party for refusing to take part in controversial elections this year. Suu Kyi met with lawyers Kyi Win and Nyan Win on 7 April at her Rangoon house-cum-prison, primarily to discuss the next appeal against her house arrest. During the meeting, however, she expressed her gratitude for the “unity” of the party in making the decision. “She said she greatly thanked us for the decision, and thanked all the people from township level and central executive committee members for...agreeing unanimously without protest,” Nyan Win said. He added that they discussed the future of the party, which is now facing abolition after refusing to register for the elections. Suu Kyi reportedly said that “careful consideration” about the coming years will be needed, while other NLD members have previously said that the party will return to its grassroots work after acknowledging that it had been an ineffective player in Burmese politics since its inception two decades ago. The party is also launching a lawsuit to challenge the election laws, under which Suu Kyi is barred from participating and the NLD forced to expel her if it wants to play any role. ([8 April 2010 DVB](#))

### **7 April 2010**

#### **Aung San Oo loses case to stop Suu Kyi’s house repairs**

The lawsuit filed by a brother of Aung San Suu Kyi to stop her continuing repairs on her crumbling two-storey villa was rejected by a court in Rangoon on Tuesday, a lawyer for the pro-democracy leader said. Elder brother Aung San Oo, a US citizen, had through his lawyer Han Toe, sought an injunction from the Rangoon Division Court on January 21 to halt renovations that included fixing the leaking roof of the house on University Avenue Road. The lawsuit was rejected, Nyan Win, a lawyer for Aung San Suu Kyi, said. With the approval of the Rangoon City Development Committee, lawyers for Aung San Suu Kyi had filed a counterclaim on February 4. They had submitted that the renovation would not cause damage to the property, the ownership of which is under dispute, so her brother could not object to the repairs, he said. “The lawsuit of Aung San Oo was rejected at noon on April 6, because it lacked sufficient basis. So, we have won in court,” Nyan Win said. “Renovations to her residence can resume on April 8 after a copy of the order of the Rangoon Division Court is submitted to the Rangoon City Development Committee.” In its verdict, the court cited general principles of safety and maintenance as reasons for deciding against Aung San Oo, he said. ([7 April 2010 Mizzima](#))

### **Other News**

Following bombings in April, in Rangoon and Kachin State that killed at least 14 people, and wounded more than 180, AAPP is concerned that dissidents will be targeted for arrests, as has occurred in the past following similar acts of violence. The SPDC are blaming the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors for the explosions, in Rangoon, and arrested Phyo Wei Aung, 31, from Sanchaung, Rangoon, one week after the bombings. They are currently looking for three other VBSW members, also accused of the bombings. The police claim Phyo Wei Aung, visited the VBSW camp in Mae Sot,

Thailand twice last year for bomb training. Two other individuals, journalist Maung Zeya, 55, and his son Sithu Zeya, who were arrested on 17 April for allegedly taking photographs of the blast scene, remain in detention. Reports suggest, in Kachin state, over 100 villagers have been picked up and interrogated by Military Affairs Security and local authorities in relation to the bombing there on 17 April. Some are still detained and there are reports of detainees being beaten by the authorities during interrogation.

Also in April, Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein quit his military post in order to form a new political party that will run in the 2010 elections. This move is seen to be in violation of the Political Parties Registration law, which prohibits civil servants from taking part in political parties.

## **20 April 2010**

### **A new year but the same injustice: concerns for dissidents in the aftermath of bombings**

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP) expresses its deepest condolences for those killed and injured in the bombings in Rangoon and in Kachin State during Thingyan (Burmese New Year). AAPP is concerned that the current bombings will lead to an increase in the harassment and arrest of political dissidents, as has occurred in the past. Reportedly, a few people have already been detained after the recent explosions. Following previous bombings, such as those in 2005, 1996 and 1989, political activists have been falsely accused, tortured and unlawfully imprisoned for these crimes, in an attempt by the regime to damage the reputation of the NLD and other opposition groups. In Burma, there is a well-established pattern of wrongful imprisonment of those who speak out against the regime, with the SPDC blaming political dissidents and democracy activists for crimes they did not commit. "The scapegoating of political dissidents amounts to a serious abuse of the criminal justice system, prevents proper investigation and ensures the real perpetrators are not brought to justice" AAPP Joint Secretary Ko Bo Kyi said. The tragic case of Thant Zaw and Nyi Nyi Oo, two NLD members wrongfully convicted of bombing a petroleum factory in July 1989, illustrates this travesty. In the absence of any evidence of involvement in the bombing, confessions were extracted under repeated and brutal torture and the two were sentenced to death for high treason and murder. Despite a man confessing to the bombing and stating that the NLD members did not take part in the incident, Thant Zaw and Nyi Nyi Oo were never released. Twenty-one years later Nyi Nyi Oo and Thant Zaw remain in prison for a crime they never committed. "Those political prisoners, such as Nyi Nyi Oo and Thant Zaw, currently in prison on false criminal charges relating to bombings must be immediately released, their criminal records wiped and the suffering they have experienced, as a result of wrongful imprisonment and torture by the authorities, acknowledged and addressed" Ko Bo Kyi said. (20 April 2010 AAPP)

## **21 April 2010**

### **Festival Bombing Death Toll Rises**

The New Year festival bombing death toll in Rangoon has risen to 10 dead, according to Rangoon media this week. The latest victim, Soe Moe Htun, 19, died on Monday according to a report in the Rangoon-based journal, First Eleven. The deaths include seven men and three women. A Burmese military region commander, Col Ohn Cho of Rangoon Division No. 4 was critically wounded in the blast. The New Light of Myanmar reported that eight people died and 170 were injured after three explosions occurred in a holiday pavilion in Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township in Rangoon on April 15. A Rangoon-based editor said the two recent deaths occurred after the victims had been held in intensive care for six days. The New Light of Myanmar ran an article this week that blamed exiled Burmese opposition groups for the bombings. The story said terrorist groups were responsible for the blasts and authorities have offered a US \$1,000 reward for information about the identity of the people responsible. Nyan Win, a spokesperson for the National League for Democracy, said acts that injure the public are unacceptable. Aye Tha Aung, a Rangoon-based Arakanese politician, also condemned the blasts, saying, "No politician wants to see such brutal incidents that kill innocent people." A pro-junta political party, the National Unity Party, released a statement on Friday that said harming innocent people was indefensible. According to a report of the Rangoon-based journal Myanmar Times in January, Pol Col Sit Aye, the head of the Department of Transitional Crime, said the regime plans to introduce an anti-terrorism law this year. Observers and lawyers contacted by The Irrawaddy expressed concern that the regime's anti-terrorism law will be used by the military government as a tool to control opposition groups' activities. Burma currently has no anti-terrorism law. However, individuals or organizations that work with or receive support from illegal groups such as dissident or armed groups can be charged under Section 17/1 of the Illegal Organization Act. Penalties range from 3 to 5 years in prison, according to lawyers. ([http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=18289](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18289))

## **30 April 2010**

### **Burmese PM to head political party**

Burma's prime minister, who earlier this week quit his military post, has applied to form a new party ahead of controversial elections this year. "Prime minister Thein Sein will lead the Union Solidarity and Development Party," a government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Some other ministers are also involved in the party, including agriculture minister Htay Oo and industry minister Aung Thaung, the official said. He stepped down from his military post on Monday, state media reported, along with 22 other senior ministers. Analysts predicted then that the move would pre-empt the formation of a party to contest Burma's first elections in 20 years. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) sounds eerily similar to the government proxy organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), which had been billed to play a leading role in Burmese politics following the elections. The USDP is reported to have 27 members in total, with Thein Sein at the helm. The spokesperson for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party, Nyan Win, said that it was unclear whether the new party was a spin-off of the USDA. He added that the

appointment of Thein Sein as the party head was in “clear violation of the Political Parties Registration Law which states that civil servants cannot take part in political parties”. The New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported that 25 organisations have applied to form political parties over the past month. So far 12 of those have been cleared to campaign, while the rest are being scrutinised, the paper said. ([30 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **Key International Developments**

Burma continues to attract significant international attention resulting from the impending dissolution of the NLD as well as other issues related to the upcoming national elections. In a sign of increased regional scrutiny with regard to Burma, more than 100 ASEAN lawmakers urged leaders at an early April meeting to impose sanctions against Burma and consider its expulsion from the regional body for ignoring calls for free and fair elections. Similarly, the European Union announced in late April that it would extend sanctions against Burma for failing to meet demands for democratic reforms.

US policymakers continued to defend their new engagement policy with Burma, stressing that the process will require patience and time. Evidently, not all US politicians share this view, as US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher called for a Burma military revolt in late April.

Momentum for a UN commission of inquiry into human rights abuses of the Junta continued to grow, in April. Burma Campaign UK called for the European Union to follow the lead of the United Kingdom and Czech Republic in calling for a commission of inquiry into crimes committed by the Burmese junta.

### **27 April 2010**

#### **EU sanctions on Burma extended**

The European Union announced on 26 April that it had extended its sanctions on Burma following the ruling junta’s refusal to meet demands for democratic reform. The sanctions have been extended for one year, according to a statement released following a Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg that has been hailed by pro-democracy groups. “The Council deems it necessary to extend the restrictive measures provided for in the current EU Decision by another year. The Council underlines its readiness to revise, amend or reinforce the measures it has already adopted in light of developments on the ground,” it said, adding that it would “respond positively to genuine progress in Burma/Myanmar”. ([27 April 2010 DVB](#))

### **26 April 2010**

#### **EU to adopt Burma election statement**



The European Union is today due to formally adopt a statement in which it expresses “serious concern” about elections in Burma this year whilst eyeing the possibility of sending a senior delegation to meet with the ruling generals. A diplomatic source told AFP that the EU will urge the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to accept the “exploratory mission”, although didn’t elaborate on the specifics of the visit, nor the proposed date. The statement also calls on Burma’s military leaders “to cooperate fully” with Piero Fassino, the bloc’s special envoy to the country. Various members of the EU have individually criticised election laws which effectively block the country’s main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), from running, but this is the first collective statement released since the laws were announced in March. “The EU believes that despite everything there is room for manoeuvre,” the European diplomat said. “But we are only prepared to go there if we are received at the highest level. We are not prepared to be humiliated.” The comment likely refers to Than Shwe, the reclusive ruling general who often avoids contact with foreign diplomats visiting Burma. The source may also be hinting at a meeting with detained NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose strict house arrest rules bar her from contact with outsiders, although this was lifted temporarily last year when she met with US senator Jim Webb. ([26 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **23 April 2010**

### **US congressman calls for Burmese military revolt**

US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher has urged “patriots” in the Burmese military to join pro-democracy advocates like Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic fighters to overthrow the military junta and restore democracy in Burma. Speaking on the floor of the House of Representative, the California congressman said that patriots and freedom-loving people of Burma will either join against tyranny and foreign domination, or their country will be lost for generations to come. “The time has come to choose,” Rohrabacher said. “Let the Burmese, the ethnic people of Burma, the business and military leaders who long for a legitimate and honest government, and all of the other patriots there, let them have the courage to step forward and join together and retake their country. The time is now.” Rohrabacher said there needs to be reconciliation between the Burmans and the ethnic groups who make up half of Burma's population, adding that in the decades-old insurgency the ethnic fighters have been the primary source of opposition to Burma’s iron-fisted dictatorship. “Urban democratic leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi and other patriotic Burmans have been beaten down and repressed and imprisoned. These two elements must come together, the Burmans and the ethnic groups that are fighting the Burmese dictatorship,” Rohrabacher said. “They must come together as one under a banner promising respect for the rights and traditions of various people, those various people who make up the wonderfully diverse nation of Burma.” Rohrabacher appealed for members of the Burmese military to join the fight against the junta. “This is a great moment of opportunity,” Rohrabacher said. “People of Burma, do not let this moment pass by. The world will celebrate with you as you recapture your nation. We are on your side.” ([23 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

**22 April 2010**

**Obama administration defends Burma policy**

The Obama administration on Wednesday defended its policy of engagement with the Burmese military junta following calls from several US senators to review the policy. P J Crowley, the US assistant secretary of state for public affairs, said the administration would continue its new policy of simultaneous engagement and economic sanctions and hoped that dialogue with the junta would yield positive results. "The challenge of Burma wasn't created in one year; it's not going to be solved in one year," Crowley said. "We have shifted to a policy of engagement following a comprehensive review of our Burma policy. We did it because, quite honestly, sanctions alone have not yielded results either. We have begun high-level dialogue with the government of Burma on a wide range of issues of interest and concern, and we will continue this conversation," he said. ([22 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

**9 April 2010**

**EU urged to join call for UN probe**

The European Union should follow the lead of its members United Kingdom and Czech Republic in calling for a United Nations commission of inquiry into serious crimes committed by the Burmese junta, campaigners have said. Burma Campaign UK, based in London, on Thursday applauded the Czech Republic's stance on its support for the establishment of commission of inquiry to probe possible crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese rulers. Similar commissions have been set up to examine events in the Darfur region of Sudan and Lebanon. Prague, in response to a reporter's questions, said: "The Czech Republic remains concerned at continuous grave human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar. Despite the government's 'Roadmap to Democracy' and before the expected this year's elections, political repression, and military attacks against civilians of ethnic nationalities continue in scale and gravity that may entail international crimes under the terms of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court." ([9 April 2010 Mizzima](#))

**US will continue Burma engagement policy**

The Obama administration said on Friday it will continue its new policy of engaging the Burmese leadership despite the fact that the military junta has ignored, and often directly contradicted, the advice of the international community. "We are engaging Burma," said P J Crowley, the US assistant secretary of state for public affairs. "Other countries in the region are engaging Burma, obviously, in a variety of contexts, including through Asean [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]." Crowley said the Obama administration has been talking with India and China regarding Burma, but did not provide details. "I think everybody has an interest in stability in the region, seeing Burma emerge from its isolation. But clearly, there are steps that Burma has to take, and we will continue our regional dialogue and encourage everyone to provide Burma the same message," Crowley said in response to a question. ([9 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

### **ASEAN stops short of criticizing elections**

Southeast Asian ministers meeting at a regional summit said Thursday they quizzed Burma over its controversial election plans, but stopped short of criticising the ruling junta. Burma plans to hold its first elections in two decades later this year, but new laws that effectively ban detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part have led her party to boycott the vote. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers met late Wednesday ahead of the bloc's summit, and said the issue of holding free and fair polls was raised with their Burma counterpart Nyan Win. "We were not criticising him or lecturing him or telling him what to do. We were just making observations and suggestions and he took them in a good spirit," said Singapore foreign minister George Yeo. "The coming months will be critical months for Myanmar [Burma]," Yeo said, but added: "In the end, what happens in Myanmar is for the Myanmar people to decide. We are outsiders... we hope that they would make progress quickly." Amnesty International said on 7 April that Burma's flawed election plans and "appalling" human rights record should dominate the ASEAN summit, but Yeo defended the group's policy of non-interference in members' affairs. "We are not in a position to punish Myanmar," Yeo said, adding that tough United States and European Union sanctions had failed to yield any change. ([9 April 2010 DVB](#))

### **7 April 2010**

#### **Burma should top ASEAN agenda: rights groups**

International and regional rights groups and activists want the representatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to prioritize Burma's political crisis during the regional summit in Hanoi on April 8-9. London-based international rights group Amnesty International released a statement on Wednesday saying that the Burma issue should be at the top of the agenda for Asean leaders in Hanoi as Burma's human rights record is a serious breach of the Asean Charter. A regional rights group, the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), released a press advisory on Wednesday to Asean leaders to take urgent and tough action on Burma to obtain a clear and tangible commitment for a free and fair election. The petition was signed by 105 legislators from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Singapore. The press advisory also called on the summit to urgently raise and discuss the dire need for action and meaningful solutions to the political and human rights problems currently plaguing Burma. ([7 April 2010 Irrawaddy](#))

#### **ASEAN lawmakers urge Burma expulsion**

More than 100 ASEAN lawmakers on 7 April urged leaders meeting in Vietnam this week to impose sanctions on Burma and consider its expulsion for ignoring calls for free and fair elections. The legislators said leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at their annual summit Thursday and Friday should "urgently discuss" the election due to be held in Burma later this year. In a petition to the leaders, the parliamentarians condemned election laws unveiled by Burma's junta which have been criticised as undermining the credibility of the vote, the first to be held in the country for two decades. "With the promulgation of these apparently biased laws... the regime has

forfeited its best opportunity to show willingness to engage in an inclusive process of national reconciliation,” the petition said. The petition, endorsed by 105 members of parliament from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, was sent to leaders by the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), which lobbies for democratic reforms in Burma. Burma has in the past escaped collective censure by ASEAN because of the group’s policy of non-interference in members’ internal affairs. ([7 April 2010 DVB](#))

## **Opinion Section**

Opinion editorials in April continued to focus on the fallout resulting from the election laws and impending dissolution of the NLD.

### **Will ASEAN eventually deliver? – by Roshan Jason (9 April 2010)**

Online at: <http://www.dvb.no/analysis/will-asean-eventually-deliver/8600>

## **Conclusion**

The month of April ended with authorities in Rangoon issuing bomb alerts, warning residents that attacks similar to the April 15 water festival bombings could be imminent and asking people to report suspicious activity. Unfortunately, bombings of this nature are not new to Burma and may be a sign of things to come. In this year alone there have been 9 separate bomb incidents, with 7 taking place in April.

In the lead up to the elections, more bombs may be likely, with the regime using such incidents to further justify the entrenchment of the military in Burmese society. Military regimes benefit from heightened instability and insecurity, using it to justify more repressive measures and the maintenance of power, at any cost. The SPDC are blaming the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors for the April explosions, in Rangoon. At a press conference the SPDC also linked the following exile opposition groups to the bombings: All Burma Students’ Democratic Front, the Democratic Alliance of Burma, the National Council of the Union of Burma, the Karen National Union.

Within days of the bombings the SPDC blamed opposition groups in exile for the attacks, in State run newspapers. Everyday since the bombings, State-run media published articles accusing opposition groups of targeting innocent civilians. The media in Burma has been saturated by stories of death and destruction. Fear mongering, of this sort, is a common tactic used by military dictatorships to accomplish their most important objectives – to counter threats to their power and preserve their position of privilege.

The tragedy is the deaths of those killed and injured in the bombings and the devastation this causes for their loved ones; a second tragedy is the manipulation of such events to benefit the military regime, in the absence of the rule of law. In Burma, there is a well-established pattern of wrongful imprisonment of those who speak out against the regime, with the SPDC blaming political dissidents and democracy activists for crimes they did not commit. By punishing the wrong people the real perpetrators get a way scot-free, and the travesty of justice, that is Burma, continues.

Following the NLD's decision not to register and therefore contest the election, Party members reportedly faced abuse by SPDC friendly thugs and pressure to close offices, through out April. NLD member, Chit Tin, was attacked on 3 April and sustained serious injuries to the head. The attacker reportedly received orders from the USDA. Attacks such as these on NLD members are common place. Last year police refused to arrest a mob of people led by a government official who beat two party members. In another incident the family members of an assaulted NLD member were the ones put in prison for supposed 'retaliation' against the attackers. When lawless agents are given a free reign, it sends a message to the people that, there is no rule of law; only the 'un-rule of law'. Where the authorities fail to prevent, intervene or punish proxy groups, they themselves are culpable and must be held responsible.

As is always the case with Burma violent incidents, like these, take place in a culture of impunity. Those who attempted to assassinate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and killed 70 others in the Deyapin massacre have never been held to account. As the year unfolds, increased brutality, repression and arrests of NLD members, and other opposition groups boycotting the sham electoral process, is to be expected.