



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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



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MONTHLY CHRONOLOGY September 2010

Summary of current situation

There are a total of **2193** political prisoners in Burma. This is an overall increase of 10 in comparison to last month's figure of 2,183. In September, 13 political prisoners were arrested, four of those arrested were released within the month. Retrospective information explains why there is actually an overall increase of 10 this month.

These include:

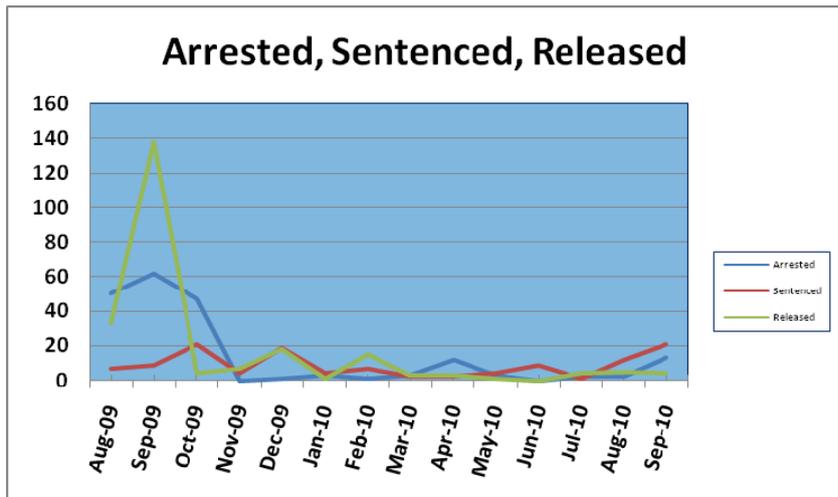
CATEGORY	NUMBER
Monks	256
Members of Parliament	12
Students	285
Women	176
NLD members	413
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	31
Ethnic nationalities	233
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	20
Teachers	26
Media activists	40
Lawyers	12
Labor activists	36
88 Generation Students	39
Doctors	11
Individual	602
In poor health	141
Total	2193

Since the protests in September 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **1,178** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

Monthly Trend Analysis

During the month of September 2010, **11** student activists, one journalist and one NLD member were arrested. **21** political prisoners were sentenced, including two monks sentenced for politically motivated charges.

Political prisoners continue to suffer the consequences of inhumane living conditions. At least **141** 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.



During the month of September, there was an increase in election related arrests, including the 11 students who were arrested for anti-election campaigning and one monk was sentenced to 15 years in prison for his part in anti-election campaigns. Seven political prisoners (ABSDF members), imprisoned since 2008, had their sentences extended by 20 years. 12 labour activist were sentenced, two with sentences over twenty years long. Imprisoned Shan leader Khun Htun Oo is reportedly suffering from multiple health problems, generated by the conditions of his detention and the refusal of the prison authorities to provide him with adequate health care. The SPDC made two announcements, towards the end of the month, in regards to Daw Aung Suu Syi, firstly that she would be allowed to vote in the election and secondly that she would be released after the election on 13 November.

Torture

Torture remains a widespread practice in Burma's prisons and a serious impact on the health and well being of political prisoners, as the case of The health of monk leader Ashin Gambira, illustrates. The health of Gambira, detained in Kale prison, is deteriorating due to torture and other mistreatment during his interrogation and imprisonment.

Treatment of prisoners and their families

11 September 2010

Ethnic politicians mark imprisoned Shan leader's birthday

Burma's ethnic politicians in Rangoon held 67th anniversary birthday party of Khun Htun Oo, Chairman of defunct Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). "It was just a small ceremony held at a restaurant at 8 Miles in Rangoon. It was organized and attended by members of UNA (United Nationalities Alliance) and SNLD," he said. Khun Htun Oo, 67, party leader and elected MP for Shan State North's Hsipaw, is currently serving a 95-year term in Burma's in Putao since 3 November 2005, on charges of treason, defamation, setting

up of illegal organization and violation of the 5/96 Law prohibiting people from criticizing the constitution drafted by its rulers. He is said to be suffering from bladder distension, peptic ulcer, arthritis both in hands and knees and legs swelling since April 2009 due to inadequate exercise and lack of regular medical treatment, according to family members. Specialists, on consultation by his family, said it was also due to insufficient sunlight and ventilation. But up to date, he is still not allowed to get medical check up outside even though the family has applied to have access to medical check outside several times as there is no health service that reaches his place, Putao. He was only allowed to receive oral treatment, the family said. "It is difficult for him to move easily as he is getting older. We are worried about his condition even though he tries his best not to worry us," his daughter told SHAN. His family is allowed to visit him once a month. ([Shan Herald 13 September 2010](#))

Prisoners Released

In September, four political prisoners were released. NLD member, Tun Yin was released. Two students, Cham Myae Aung and Ye Linn Phyoe, arrested for their alleged involvement in anti-election campaigning were released, as was journalist, Aung Thu Nyein, arrested for taking pictures of the flood damaged area of Magway.

National League for Democracy

There are at least 413 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) currently in prison. The NLD, was formally disbanded by the regime this month. Despite warnings by the regime not to criticise the elections the NLD continues to support boycott activities throughout the country. The NLD announced that while it is boycotting the elections it will still monitor the process on election day. The party has been touring the country for several months to inform the population about its right not to vote, as well as to forward Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's message for unity amongst the ethnic groups. NLD's Vice Chairman, U Tin Oo and Executive members met with the families of political prisoners across the country. The health of several NLD leaders is deteriorating. Win Tin was briefly admitted to hospital after a asthma attack. Meanwhile, Tin Oo was flown to Singapore to undergo an eye operation.

27 September

NLD Marks 22 Years

At an event marking the NLD's 22nd anniversary, Vice-chairman Tin Oo says the party is reconsolidating and will be revitalized when Suu Kyi is released from detention. As it marks its 22nd anniversary on Monday, the disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD) party has claimed that it is currently reconsolidating and will be revitalized when its leader Aung San Suu Kyi is released from detention. Under the surveillance of plainclothed security forces, the anniversary event was held at the home of party vice-chairman Tin Oo in Rangoon and was attended by 300 party members and some veteran politicians. "The NLD will become stronger when Daw Suu is released," said Tin Oo, 83, who founded the party in 1988 together with Suu Kyi. "We are now consolidating our forces on a steady basis." Although the party was disbanded last month for failing to register for the Nov. 7 election, senior party officials claim that the party still exists and will continue its struggle for democracy in Burma. Party officials said the party's headquarters in Rangoon still opens every day, but that meetings are held in its members' homes in order to avoid confrontation with the regime. "We will continue to march forward with the principle of nonviolence guided by Daw Suu," Tin Oo said. Despite jail threats, the NLD has sent its representatives out to

spread the message among the electorate that Burmese citizens have the right not to vote and that they can exercise that right should they find no alternative to the NLD. Over the past 22 years, the NLD has frequently come under criticism for its unsuccessful struggle against the regime and for its aging leadership. But over the past few months, the party has undergone some changes. Party Chairman Aung Shwe, who wanted the NLD to contest the election, has not appeared at a party gathering since March 29 when a majority of party members made a decision to boycott the polls. Aung Shwe and some other top leaders, including party secretary U Lwin, were known for their cautious approach and were often frowned upon by party's active members at the township and regional levels. They also reportedly discouraged party members from joining in the 2007 monks' protests. Thus, the party has been long infamous for acrimonious relations between the "elders" and the active members at the grassroots level. This problematic relation has almost been solved since Aung Shwe and U Lwin no longer come to the party meetings, and several party members who were suspended under their leadership have been brought back within the party's fold again, according to Aye Thar Aung, the secretary of the Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament, an alliance of several political parties which won seats in the last election in 1990. Asked how the NLD will respond if another mass uprising occurred, Tin Oo said, "We will provide the leadership this time around." Led by charismatic Suu Kyi, the NLD won the 1990 election by a landslide, however the results were never honored by the regime.

[\(Irrawaddy 27 September 2010\)](#)

20 September 2010

NLD Continues Boycott Activities Despite Threats

Members of the disbanded National League for Democracy party (NLD) continued their election boycott activities despite the regime's warning of jail threats on Saturday. A group of NLD leaders in Rangoon continue their tour of several towns in Central Burma, spreading the message of their detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi that the Burmese people have a right not to vote. "We will not decrease or stop our activities," said Han Thar Myint, a central executive member of the NLD, speaking by phone from Yenanchaung. "If we care about what the government said, we will not be able to do anything." On Monday in Yenanchaung, he and a few other NLD leaders met with local party members, briefing them about the party's boycott stance against the Nov. 7 election. "A boycott means that as NLD party members, we will not vote. We will monitor the election and make complaints about irregularities on behalf of people," he said. Over the weekend, his group has already visited other towns such as Aunglan, Taungdwingyi and Natmawk. The meetings also included party members from nearby towns. On Sunday, other NLD leaders also wrapped up similar tours to Mandalay, Chin State and the northern part of Shan State while other leaders are planning a trip to Myitkyina in Kachin State for the same purpose. "We are not telling people not to vote. We are telling them that they can exercise the right not to vote," Tin Oo said. "We are explaining to people that this election will make no difference for the country. Under this Constitution the parliament cannot form a government. Only the president is empowered to form it," said lawyer Aung Thein, a party member who came back for a similar tour from Chin State. Former NLD members who formed the National Democratic Force (NDF) which is contesting the election expressed concern that these NLD activities could lead to a low voter turnout, making it more likely for the junta's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), to win a landslide victory. [\(Irrawaddy 20 September 2010\)](#)

20 September 2010

Tin Oo to have surgery for cataracts in Singapore

National League for Democracy party vice-chairman Tin Oo is to undergo cataract surgery in Singapore in the next week, political colleagues say. "We don't know yet by which airline he will travel. Pan Hlaing hospital is affiliated with hospitals in Singapore and Malaysia so when he visited Pan Hlaing, doctors found out that his cataracts were unusual and needed special

and more lengthy treatment for their removal,” Committee Representing the People’s Parliament (CRPP) secretary Aye Thar Aung told Mizzima. “He can’t even see a person standing just two or three feet away from him. His eyes are badly damaged,” Nyan Win said. A party leader estimated that he might leave Rangoon next Tuesday and that his Singapore medical trip might take between two and seven days. The hospital was arranging all travel documents and air tickets. ([Mizzima 20 September 2010](#))

19 September

Jail threat for Suu Kyi’s party (NLD)

Burmese state media warned opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s party on Saturday to drop protests against its dissolution, and threatened jail for anyone impeding the November vote. Although the National League for Democracy (NLD) – officially disbanded this week – was not directly named, the report in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said “a party” was “attempting to mislead the people into misunderstanding the law”. The article said the party was persuading people to “protest against the elections by boycotting” the 7 November vote, the first in two decades in the military-ruled nation. It listed a host of prohibited activities, including “undue influence” to prevent a person from voting and “instigation, writing, distributing or using posters or attempting by other means to disturb voting”. These acts could “on conviction be punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or with fine not exceeding one hundred thousand kyat (US\$1,000) or with both,” it said. Suu Kyi, who has been detained for much of the two decades since Burma’s last election, is due to be released just days after the upcoming vote. The Nobel peace laureate is barred from standing in the poll because she is a serving prisoner, and the NLD opted not to register because of rules that would have forced it to expel Suu Kyi and other members. An election commission announcement on Tuesday abolishing the NLD and other parties on the grounds that they had failed to register for the poll drew strong criticism from the West. Critics already fear the election is simply a means to hide the military regime behind a civilian facade. The NLD launched a counter-argument against its dissolution this week, claiming the commission lacks authority to issue the ban.

([DVB 19 September 2010](#))

14 September

Election Commission Disbands NLD

Burma’s Union Election Commission (EC) officially announced on Tuesday evening the dissolution of 10 political parties, including the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which is led by detained pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. The state-run radio and television announced at about 6 p.m on Tuesday that the NLD had been dissolved as it did not register as a political party for the November general election. The dissolved parties include five parties that were previously accepted by the EC under the party registration process. The state media said the five had been dissolved for failing to complete their candidates lists in time. There are now 37 political parties that have been granted registration. The registered parties have been told they can campaign through state-run media such as radio and television for 15 minutes each. They, however, need to inform the EC seven days in advance before running a party campaign ad. The five previously registered parties that were dissolved were named as: the Union Karen League, the Myanmar New Society Party, the Mro National Party, the Myanmar Democracy Congress and the Regional Development Party (Pyay). The other five parties were dissolved because they did not re-apply for registration, the Burmese media said. The five parties dissolved for not fulfilling

this obligation were named as: the NLD, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, the Union Pa-O National Organization, the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party and the Wa National Development Party. The state media said all 10 parties in question could no longer participate in any form of political activity. Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi's NLD won the country's last election, in 1990, by a landslide, but was never allowed to take power. ([Irrawaddy 14 September 2010](#)) ([Mizzima 14 September 2010](#))

14 September

Mandalay and Shan NLD support election boycott

Sympathetic residents from Mandalay Division and Shan State have agreed to boycott the junta's forthcoming election, in line with central National League for Democracy party policy, the opposition group announced yesterday. From Thursday until yesterday, NLD central executive committee member Ohn Kyaing and colleagues met grass-roots members from 25 townships in Mandalay Division and six townships in Shan State. "Not only grass-roots members of the party, but also many outsiders agreed to support our party's decision to boycott the election," Ohn Kyaing told Mizzima. Central executive committee member Khin Htay Kywe, central committee member Nan Khin Htwe Myint, Kyi Win and NLD youth chief Myo Nyunt accompanied Ohn Kyaing on the trip. They met citizens from Mandalay on Friday and the Shan town of Lashio on Sunday. During talks, the NLD leaders had explained why the party had decided to boycott the election, the attitude and messages of party general secretary Aung San Suu Kyi and the people's right to boycott the election in accordance with the junta's own electoral laws, he said. "After we held discussions with township NLD leaders, they told us they would pass our message on to the party's grass roots so ... [they] could in turn explain it to the people," he said. The NLD, on August 19, announced an official boycott of the forthcoming election, arguing that the junta's 2008 constitution and 2010 electoral laws are one-sided and unjust. Following the party's official decision, party vice-chairman Tin Oo and colleagues visited six townships in Irrawaddy Division, after which residents also agreed to support the boycott. Also, from June 12 to early last month, NLD leaders visited about 200 townships in Kachin, Karen, Mon, Arakan and southern Shan states as well as Mandalay, Magway and Sagaing divisions to explain the party's decision to boycott the election. "It's very good that the party leaders visited townships across the country to meet the grass roots of the party. Most party members from my township like the decision of the NLD of achieving democracy through a campaign of social work and civil resistance," Myo Naing, an NLD member from Mandalay, said. ([Mizzima 14 September 2010](#))

14 September 2010

Burmese junta electoral body formally dissolves NLD

The junta's electoral watchdog declared the National League for Democracy dissolved today, according to a report on state-run television at 6 p.m. Nyan Win, an NLD central executive committee member and one of Suu Kyi's lawyers, said: "That's [the UEC's announcement] not strange but it's in accordance with the junta's electoral laws." "We'd heard that the electoral commission announced the NLD's dissolution but, as I understand it, the UEC has neither the right to take that decision nor make such an announcement. It only has the right to decide the fates of the parties that registered with it," he said. ([Mizzima 14 September 2010](#))

13 September

Opposition Leader Win Tin Hospitalized

Win Tin, 80, the prominent leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party who was imprisoned from 1989 to 2008 has been hospitalized in a private hospital in Rangoon, his family said. "He is now at the Asia Royal General Hospital with a lung problem. But his physicians said the problem is not serious and he should recover soon," said close friend Maung Maung Khin speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday. This is his second

hospitalization since his release in September 2008 after nearly two decades as a political prisoner. In August 2009, Win Tin got treatment in the same hospital for a heart problem. Win Tin is a veteran journalist and was editor for several publications including the influential *Hantharwaddy* newspaper before it was closed down by the government in 1978. During the 1988 uprising, he was a protest leader alongside fellow writers and journalists. When the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was formed following the uprising, he became one of its key players and a close aide to Suu Kyi. ([Irrawaddy 13 September 2010](#)) ([Mizzima 13 September 2010](#))

7 September

1990 winners' committee announce vote boycott

The Committee Representing the People's Parliament in Burma announced today it would boycott the junta's planned elections on November 7. The National League for Democracy (NLD) on September 16, 1998 formed the committee (CRPP) comprised of ethnic parties that won seats in the 1990 general election and the NLD, which won more than 80 per cent of available seats. The move came after the Burma's ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), failed to answer renewed calls to recognise the results of the 1990 polls and step down. The boycott resolution was passed in the CRPP meeting last Friday at NLD party vice-chairman Tin Oo's residence attended by nine of the committee's members. The resolution urged the public to exercise its right to abstain from voting in the elections as per the provisions of junta's electoral laws by shunning polling booths on the election date. "The boycott means the people can use their right not to vote in the election if they feel it will not benefit to the people, country and themselves, in accordance with the electoral laws", CRPP general secretary Aye Thar Aung told Mizzima. "This election is conducted to bring the 2008 constitution into force ... We have objected since the constitution stage too. We raised objections to the national referendum and withdrew [from the National Convention] while it was drafting this constitution," Zomi National Congress (ZNC) chairman Pu Cing Tsian Thang said. "Announcing constituencies and constituting legislative bodies are all derived from this constitution. Doing all these things based on a not-yet-operational constitution is unconstitutional. It is wrong. So we will boycott this election", he said. ZNC is one of the constituent groups of the CRPP. CRPP leaders will accompany NLD leaders in their organisational tours to the states and division and will explain the boycott resolution. They will also listen to local people's difficulties in maintaining their livelihoods and in their daily lives. Also discussed at the meeting was the growing tension between ethnic armed ceasefire groups and junta forces over the latter's Border Guard Force (BGF), and their concerns about potential civil wars breaking out. Aye Thar Aung said that building national unity and establishing a genuine federal union could only be achieved through enacting a constitution based on the Panglong spirit, which could guarantee and implement democracy and ethnic rights. The Panglong Agreement was a deal reached between the Burmese government under Aung San and the Shan, Kachin and Chin peoples on February 12, 1947, which accepted in principle "Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas" and envisioned the creation of a Kachin State by the Constituent Assembly (Burma's first post-independence parliament). NLD vice-chairman Tin Oo, NLD central executive committee members Win Tin, Than Tun, Hla Pe, Nyunt Wei and Thaug Ko Thang from the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), Aye Thar Aung from the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Soe Win from the Democracy Party, and Pu Cing Tsian Thang from ZNC attended the meeting on Friday. Similarly, the Myanmar Democracy Congress Party general secretary Wei Hmu Thwin also told Mizzima he would boycott the vote. "The responses to political parties and activities done by election commission [the junta's Union Election Commission] are totally unacceptable and unsatisfactory so our party didn't field any candidates to the commission," he said. "Some will stand for election as independents. To stand as a political party, a party needs to field at least three candidates in this election. But our party didn't field any candidates. We can't yet say what will happen to our party",

Meanwhile, young political activists distributed in some areas of Rangoon yesterday leaflets that said people had the right to vote or not vote as per the electoral laws. They also said candidates had the right to withdraw their nomination papers in the stipulated time. The leaflets quoted the electoral rights provided by the People's Parliament Election Law Chapter 1, section two (n) as giving the right to stand in the election, not to stand, the right to withdraw nomination papers within the stipulated time and the right to vote or not vote. ([Mizzima 7 September 2010](#))

2 September

Irrawaddy people agree with poll boycott: NLD

Many Irrawaddy residents and party members have agreed to boycott Burma's first elections in 20 years on November 7, according to National League for Democracy party vice-chairman Tin Oo. His comments came today as he returned from his first trip to Irrawaddy Division since 1989, a year before the NLD won a landslide victory in Burma's last polls. The NLD was conducting a voter-education campaign in the region this week. "The people would like to boycott the election. They said they would like to cast their votes for the NLD but as the NLD had decided to boycott the election, so they also should boycott the forthcoming election. They [said they] have no option but to boycott the election", Tin Oo said. NLD leaders discussed electoral issues, youth culture and women's affairs with party members, residents and villagers, he said. "Our tour was aimed at educating and motivating people to do what they should. We helped them understand the current political conditions and advised that they need to carry out suitable actions peacefully," he told Mizzima. Tin Oo, 83, said that although he had not visited his hometown Patheingyi for a long time, he had no intention of visiting relatives, but that the objective of the tour was to reorganise NLD members and colleagues and talk to local residents. He and his colleagues saluted the statue of national independence hero General Aung San, the father of detained NLD general secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, near Titekyi Monastery in Patheingyi, and vowed that they too would continue to fight for freedom. Also on the roadshow were NLD central executive committee member Hla Pe, party members Win Myint and Kyi Win from Irrawaddy Division, and party women's and youth leaders. They also visited Kyonpyaw, Pantanaw, Maubin, Bogalay and Dedaye townships. A legal scholar, Tin Oo entered politics in 1988. In September that year he became the party's vice-chairman and in December, chairman. In 1989, he was imprisoned for seven years. Then in 2003 he was arrested again after in the "Depayin Massacre" and was sentenced to nine months in Katha Prison before being put under house arrest in 2004. He was released on February 13 this year. The NLD have been conducting such roadshows around the country since June, visiting around 200 townships in Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Tenasserim, Pegu, and Irrawaddy divisions and Shan, Mon, Kachin and Arakan states. Registrations for 42 political parties have been approved by the junta's electoral watchdog, the Union Election Commission, and 32 have submitted lists of members to the commission according to the junta's electoral laws, state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar reported on Tuesday. Among the parties, the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the National Unity Party (NUP) have the maximum numbers of candidates, which junta rules make costly to submit. ([Mizzima 2 September 2010](#))

88 Generation Students

There are 39 members of the 88 Generation Student group currently in detention. There is no news to announce in September.

Ethnic Nationalities

There are 233 members of ethnic nationalities currently held in prison. There is no news to report in September.

Monks

This month marked the third year anniversary of the monk led Saffron Revolution. Three years after 'Saffron' 262 monks and nuns remain in prison. It appears that the military regime has imposed tight restrictions on Buddhist monks in Rangoon in an attempt to prevent a recurrence of protests during the anniversary of the monk-led protests that led to a massive pro-democracy uprising in September 2007.

The health of prominent monk Gambira has reportedly deteriorated. This month Monk Okkantha, arrested for anti-election campaigning, was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He faced three charges – the Press Law, the Electronics Act, and article 505(b), for 'disturbing public tranquillity' –carrying a sentence of four years, 10 years and one year respectively. Arakanese monk Ashion Pyinya Sara, arrested in August under false charges was sentenced to eight years in prison. The public was banned from attending his trial that was held on at Sittwe district court, The appeal of a group of monks to the Western Command was ignored, and the police forcibly disbanded a group of monks gathered over the monk's situation, after threatening to arrest them.

27 September 2010

Anti-election monk sentenced to 15 years

Burmese court sentenced a monk to 15 years in prison after he was arrested last year for taking part in an anti-elections campaign. Monk Okkantha was tried by the prosecution in a closed court inside Rangoon's notorious Insein prison. His lawyer, Khin Htay Kywe, said that three charges – the Press Law, the Electronics Act, and article 505(b), which is loosely translated as 'disturbing public tranquillity' – were levelled at Okkantha, each carrying a sentence of four years, 10 years and one year respectively. He is accused of involvement in anti-election and anti-constitution campaigns in Moulmein, Mon state, in December 2009. "He was charged with the article 505(b) and the Press Law after [authorities] claimed that they found some illegal documents at the monastery where he stayed and also charged with the Electronic Act under accusation that he provided information to the Mon News Agency," said Khin Htay Kywe, adding that she will be seeking an appeal. ([DVB 28 September 2010](#))

27 September 2010

262 Monks and Nuns Still in Burmese Prisons

Three years after Burma's military regime crushed monk-led protests in September 2007, at least 262 Buddhist monks and nuns remain behind bars, according to an exiled human rights group based in Thailand. At an event marking the third anniversary of the Saffron Revolution, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners—Burma (AAPP) said that there are currently 256 monks and six nuns still in the country's notorious prisons, including some who are old and in poor health. "According to our data, Burma holds more clerics behind bars than any other country. It is quite unfortunate that the Burmese military regime often claims it is promoting Buddhism," said Bo Kyi, the joint-secretary of the AAPP. "We have learned that the well-known leading monk Ashin Gambira, who is currently being held in Kale Prison [near the Indian-Burmese border], is not well due to torture and other mistreatment during interrogation and in prison," he added. Ashin Gambira was arrested in

November 2007 and later sentenced to 63 years in prison for his role in the protests. His sentence is second only to that of Ashin Nanda Vantha in its severity. Ashin Nanda Vantha, who is currently being held in Lashio Prison, in northern Shan State, is serving a 71-year sentence after being found guilty of a variety of charges related to the uprising. ([Irrawaddy 27 September 2010](#))

20 September 2010

Meeting for Arrested Monk Foiled by Police

A meeting for the arrested monk Ashon Pyinya Sara that was organized by monks in Sittwe, the capital of Arakan, was foiled by police. Speaking to Narinjara, one monk said, "We attempted to gather at the monastery where Ashon Pyinya Sara was living for a meeting to consult on his arrest, but the meeting was postponed after police foiled the program." Police from Min Gan police station in Sittwe blocked the meeting on the pretense that the monastery was not allowed to be used for such on orders from the high authority. "Around ten monks arrived at the front of the monastery to attend the meeting but they gave up their plan after the police threatened to arrest us if we did not follow their orders," the monk said. The meeting was organized by the abbot of Vasali Dhama Pala Monastery in Sittwe, to discuss the latest situation of Ashon Pyinya Sara, who is being detained in Sittwe prison. "The abbot invited some monks who are close to him to consult on the affairs of arrested monk Pyinya Sara, because his trial will be finished soon and the judge will pass his verdict. Before the verdict is passed, we should do something for his release - so we arranged the meeting," the monk added. It was learned that many believe the arrest of Ashon Pyinya Sara is related to politics and his attitudes about the military government. U Pyinya Sara is now being detained at Sittwe prison and authorities have filed seven charges against him. Among the charges, trials in six of the cases have been completed, while the charge in the final case to be tried is misappropriation of funds donated by foreign countries. A verdict is expected to be passed in the case next week. ([Narinjara 24 September 2010](#))

14 September

Military Restricts Rangoon Monks

Burma's military government has imposed tight restrictions on Buddhist monks in Rangoon in an attempt to prevent a recurrence of protests during the anniversary of the monk-led protests that led to a massive pro-democracy uprising in September 2007. Rangoon's sources said the military junta told the Association of Abhidhamma Propagation in Rangoon to hold a quiet celebration for the 43rd annual Abhidhamma exams in Rangoon. Speaking to *The Irrawaddy*, a senior Buddhist monk whose duty is to check exam papers and protect monks while they are taking the exams said, "They are not allowing us to use loudspeakers or put up flags and signboards during the Abhidhamma exam this year." The exam, which tests knowledge of texts that are thought to originate from the 3rd century BCE and contain the thoughts of the Buddha's disciples and followers, is held from Sept. 11 to 19 at the Abhidhamma Yadanayaka Monastery in Bahan township near the Shwedagon Pagoda. The restrictions also extend to lay associations in residential blocks set up to donate food to monks. They now have to get permission to invite monks to merit-making ceremonies when food is donated and they must be responsible for security. "We have to take responsibility for monk's behavior when they come to our ceremonies, so if the monks protest like they did in the saffron uprising, we will be responsible and could be sent to prison," said one association leader. Fearing protests, the authorities have deployed more security forces on the streets near monasteries and pagodas, with tight security being enforced near Shwedagon Pagoda. If security forces suspect a monk or a lay person, they follow them and photograph

them. Meanwhile a source in Rangoon's police said that the Ministry of Home Affairs released a statement instructing police to crack down on protesters who disturb the upcoming election. "We have started training on how to block roads and control protesters and even on how to prevent fire as part of our security procedures prior to the coming election," he said. Burma's state-run newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar*, reported on Tuesday that the authorities found several bombs in Pegu, Thaton and Rangoon recently, and accused insurgents of planting them, saying they are trying to kill innocent people and destroy public property. ([Irrawaddy 14 September 2010](#))

11 September 2010

15 Abbots Appeal to Western Command on Behalf of Arrested Monk

15 abbots in Arakan State have appealed to the newly appointed Western Command Commander Brigadier Soe Thein to act justly and fairly toward arrested Arakanese historian monk Ashon Pyinya Sara, said one abbot. "We sent the five-page appeal letter with the signatures of 15 monks to the Western Command Commander on 7 September, requesting they treat U Pyinya Sara justly and fairly in accordance with the law. U Pyinya Sara had many charges filed against him after he was arrested. Some charges are unrelated to his arrest and some are unacceptable. So I requested the Western Command Commander to reduce some of the charges and to try him justly in accordance with Burmese law," he said. Among the monks who joined the appeal, 13 are from well-known monasteries in Sittwe while another two are from Ponna Kyunt and Min Bya Townships. "The authority told us at first the reason for his arrest is that U Pyinya Sara was living with a woman, but later the authority charged him with several other crimes beyond that. So it is unacceptable. Because of that we requested the Western Command Commander to consider the arrest of U Pyinya Sara on the many charges against him," the monk said. In the appeal letter, the abbots explained that U Pyinya Sara is a historian monk who also carried out social works by keeping many orphans in his monasteries. He began establishing the orphanages in 1989 and has sacrificed for 20 years for the orphans staying there. So the abbots urged the Western Commander to consider his good behaviour and to think about withdrawing some of the more unjust charges, such as the charges for disrupting the stability of the state. ([Narinjara 13 September 2010](#))

1 September 2010

Authority Bans Public at Ashion Pyinya Sara Trial

The military authority banned the public from attending the trial of Arakanese historian monk Ashion Pyinya Sara's trial that was held on Monday in the Sittwe district court, despite previously allowing the public to be present when the monk was produced before the court. A relative of the monk said, "We went to the court to hear the trial of U Pyinya Sara on Monday, but the authorities did not allow us to attend the hearing." Since his arrest on July 27, Ashion Pyinya Sara has been brought before the court three times. All previous times, members of the public were able to sit in the courtroom to hear the trial. "Many armed security police were deployed at the entrance gate of the court compound as well as inside the courtroom on the day. The police officials barred us from entering the courtroom to hear the trial, but the police did not disclose why the authority was banning the public from the trial," he added. On 17 August, during the second day of the trial, the government's main witness, Daw Mala, stated before the judge that the monk had not lived with her and that that the monk was innocent of the charges. She confessed to accusing the monk of cohabitation in order to get money after the complainants, U Tun Thein and Aung Win Kyaw, offered to pay her two million kyat if she accused Ashion Pyinya Sara of living with her. News about Daw Mala's confession spread wide and many people realized the accusations against the monk are

baseless. "The authority worried the information from the trial would leak out if the public was allowed to attend the court. So the authority barred the public from attending the hearing. It further proves the charges against Ashion Pyinya Sara have been fabricated by the authority," the relative said. It was learned that many people believe the arrest of Ashion Pyinya Sara is related to politics and his behavior against the military government. U Pyinya Sara is now being detained at the Sittwe prison and authorities have filed seven charges against him. Among them is one serious charge of disrupting the stability of the state. ([Narinjara 1 September 2010](#))

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There are currently 20 Cyclone Nargis volunteers held in prison. There is no news to report in September.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers

There are currently at least 40 journalists held in prison. A junior reporter for the *Weekly Eleven Journal* was detained for two days for taking pictures of the damage from the flood in Magway and for refusing to sign a pledge not to take anymore pictures. He was released due to the efforts of his newspaper editors.

17 September 2010

Editors secure release of cadet held over Magway flood photos

A cadet reporter for the *Weekly Eleven Journal* was released after two days' detention for refusing to sign a pledge that he would stop taking photos of flood damage in Magway Division, central Burma. Aung Thu Nyein, 28, held at the Magway Township chief's office in the compound of Magway Police Station No. 1, was released at 10 a.m. today, the journal's website reported. "Our intern has been released as the result of negotiations. He did not need to sign any pledge," the website quoted the journal's managing editor, Wai Phyto, as saying. The editor was referring to a statement officials told Aung Thu Nyein to sign swearing that he would refrain from taking any more photos of flood damage, as he had been doing on Monday when arrested. The cadet had returned to his Magway home immediately after release but details of his condition remained unknown apart from what was already available on the journal's website, Wai Phyto told Mizzima. ([Mizzima 10 September 2010](#))

4 September 2010

We owe him a great debt'

Burmese activists and journalists have been among the many paying tribute to Sam Kalayane, who passed away on Saturday. The 50-year-old Thai national and founder of Images Asia was described by Nang Hseng Nong, the head of the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), as "one of the first Thai people to support the democracy movement in Burma". His focus on Burma spanned more than two decades, triggered by the student uprising of 1988, and took him deep inside the country to document the plight of ethnic minorities, as well as pro-democracy activists. Khin Maung Win, deputy director of *DVB* who worked with Sam for more than 20 years, said: "Sam Kalayane was the first Thai student to meet and help the Burmese students who fled to the border with Thailand [after the 1988 uprising]. "Burmese democracy groups in exile, including the All Burma Students'

Democratic Front [ABSDF] owed him much. He helped with everything for the Burma VJ shooting in Thailand. His contribution and help for the Burma democracy movement should be written down in history.” His battle with lung cancer came to an end on 3 September at around 4pm. He is survived by his wife and daughter. ([DVB 6 September 2010](#))

3 September 2010

Poet holds first exhibition since release

Burmese poet and artist Saw Wai, who spent more than two years in prison for his 2008 acrostic poem that concealed the message “Power Crazy Senior General Than Shwe”, is holding his first art show since his release. The “3 Artists Show” at Rangoon’s Adipati Hall, which includes 33 of his paintings and works of writer Moe Thu and Saw Wai’s daughter Ei, runs until Sunday. “This is my first show since I was released from prison. The inspectors came to the exhibition. They interrogated us, as is their custom. Then, my painting *April*, which I completed in 2003, was not allowed to be exhibited. In fact, the picture just featured a traditional water-festival scene,” Saw Wai said. His installation, *Sick World*, has drawn great visitor interest. ([Mizzima 3 September 2010](#))

Women

There are currently 176 women political prisoners. There is no news to report this month.

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least 31 members of the Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network currently held in prison. There is no news to report in September.

Labour Activists

There are currently at least 35 labour activists held in prison. Twelve labour activists, arrested earlier this year, were sentenced at Insenin Special Court. They were accused of trying to set off a bomb in Hlaing Thayar township. Of concern this month was the decree proposed to fire any workers participating in industrial action and further ‘blacklist’ them. According to a group of workers associations, it appears that “the reason for the decrees is that the junta wants to prevent further industrial action and employers don’t want their workers taking action to demand better wages, so now they can fire those who protest and stop them from getting jobs elsewhere.”

Workers associations condemn apparent anti-labour ‘decree’

A group of Asian trade unions and workers associations has condemned a little-known ‘decree’ made in Burma on 20 August. The decree proposed to fire any workers participating in industrial action and further ‘blacklist’ them. The meeting to pen the regulation was apparently attended by heads of industry and military personnel, including Lt-Gen Myint Swe. The statement from the group of organisations said that “the reason for the decree, labour activists in Burma believe, is that the junta wants to prevent further industrial action and employers don’t want their workers taking action to demand better wages, so now they can fire those who protest and stop them from getting jobs elsewhere.” Amongst the condemning groups was the Working People’s Association of Indonesia, the Network of

Progressive Youth Burma, All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions and the Malaysian Socialists, amongst others. However the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Steve Marshall told *DVB* that he had approached the government regarding the decree, who seemingly denied the existence of any such legislation. "In terms of that apparent order, I did raise it with the government, in terms of discussions that have been taking place on freedom of association and I'm advised very strongly that no such order exists". Moe Swe of the Yaung Chi Oo Worker's Association told *DVB* that "I think its to do with the election, the government don't want any strikes before the elections." With apparent provisions in the 2008 constitution protecting the right of association along with inevitably vague provisos against causing 'public disturbances', there will be a need for new laws governing workers' rights, or indeed space, according to the constitution, at least for greater freedom of association. "Within the constitution there is the provision for freedom of association and the right to be represented for workers and the government has already indicated their intention to draft new trade union legislation for presentation to the new parliament," Marshall said. "They have already had initial discussions with ILO staff in Geneva on that subject...the important thing is not only the content of the constitution but the legislation that is put into place to apply a constitution and from what we understand at the present time the government are working on legislation." Such talks have lead to suspicions that the government would try the proverbial tactic of forming a 'national union', a tactic used by General Ne Win, Burma's first dictator, and by autocratic regimes elsewhere. It misses the corporatist or inherent necessity for smaller units of organisation in a realistic economy that are needed when advocating between workers and those in power. All this follows industrial action in March this year when workers demanded days off for public holidays and decent wages. Wages for factory workers in Rangoon are said to hover just over a dollar a day, the roughly defined international poverty line, and deplorable working conditions are the norm. These actions were described as "nothing new" by Marshall, who, despite many voices describing Burma as an extremely oppressive working environment, sounded a note of "cautious optimism" regarding future legislation. After the March protests, concerted calls for the military to allow the formation of unions were made. These however were denied by the government who stated that industrial action was 'punishable' and publication of materials calling for workers rights punishable under draconian press laws. ([DVB 17 September 2010](#))

Students

There are currently at least 283 students held in prison. In the lead up to the elections students were targeted this month for their anti-election activities. In September, 11 university students, were arrested in Rangoon for distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the upcoming elections. These students include technology students Tha Htoo Aung and Zarni Lin; Zin Min Htet, an extra-mural student; Kyaw Thiha and Kyaw Thu Soe, who are studying geography; and economics student Ye Lin Phyo. They were arrested for distributing the leaflets on the Dagon University campus. Meanwhile in Sittwe university, the authorities have forbidden students from having cameras to prevent them from taking and sending pictures to exiled activists or outside media.

29 Sep 2010

Students arrested for urging election boycott

Eleven student activists were arrested last week for distributing leaflets in Rangoon urging an election boycott, according to a leading student group. Five of the arrested students were later released but the remaining six are still in custody, said spokesman Zarni of the underground All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) on Wednesday. The ABFSU named the six as technology students Tha Htoo Aung and Zarni Lin; Zin Min Htet, an extra-mural student; Kyaw Thiha and Kyaw Thu Soe, who are studying geography; and economics student Ye Lin Phyo. They were arrested for distributing the leaflets on the Dagon University campus. Zarni said the leaflets reminded citizens of their right not to vote and containing the messages: "If you vote the USDP [the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party], monks and people will be killed again" and "the 2008 constitution and elections guarantee that military rule will be prolonged." State media reported in August, however, that anyone who "disrupts" the election could face a punishment of up to 20 years imprisonment under the State Emergency Act 3. Dagon University's rector, U San, declined to comment on the arrests when The Irrawaddy contacted him on Wednesday. "I don't have information about it," he said. A junior official at the university, however, confirmed the arrests. Dissident sources inside Burma said stickers and leaflets are appearing in Rangoon and Mandalay urging an election boycott. The campaign is reportedly organized by the ABFSU, the 88 Generation Students group and Generation Wave. According to a Burmese human rights group in Thailand, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPP), 282 student activists are currently in custody in Burma. Among them is ABFSU leader Kyaw Ko Ko, who is serving an eight year sentence in Taunggyi Prison imposed in March 2008 because of his involvement in the September 2008 demonstrations. (Irrawaddy)

20 September

Crackdown widened on anti-elections campaigns

Five youths have been arrested in Rangoon after police caught them distributing leaflets calling for a boycott of the 7 November elections. The five – Zin Min Htet, Kyaw Thiha, Chan Myay Aung, Thar Htoo Aung and Zarni Linn – are all university students in Rangoon. Two police arrived at the house of each of the five at around 1am on 17 September and carried out what appears to be a coordinated arrest. It is not yet known where they are being held. A friend of the group said that police have also accused them of being behind a recent graffiti attack on a signboard outside the office of the Election Commission (EC) in North Okkalapa township, where the youths were arrested. While momentum is growing among parties campaigning for the elections, the vocal pro-boycott lobby is also widening its movements. But it faces possibly severe recriminations from the junta, which is looking to place the country on lockdown with seven weeks to go until the vote. The disbanded opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party was warned on Saturday that continued calls for Burmese to boycott the polls could "on conviction be punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year" or a US\$1,000 fine. But not all are heeding the threat, which observers see as an attempt by Burma's ruling generals to silence the country's main referents and rush through the vote as smoothly as possible. A coalition of five youth activists have said they will be carrying out "visible" anti-elections campaigns across the country. "The 2010 elections are based on the 2008 constitution, which was forcibly approved at the price of more than 100,000 lives lost in cyclone Nargis," said Min Thway Thit, spokesperson for the Burma Democracy Activists Alliance (BDAA) group, referencing the referendum that was rushed through in the weeks following Burma's worst-recorded natural disaster in May 2008. A statement released by the BDAA said that parties competing in the polls, which are

the country's first in 20 years, are "just puppets [used] to protect the profit of the military dictators". Despite there being a majority of apparently pro-junta parties, a number of opposition and 'third force' groups will be competing in the elections. The coalition is formed of the 2007 Generation Students Federation, the All Burma Student Federations' Union ABSFU), Myaylatt Students' Organisation, the New Saffron Generation Organisation and the New Generation Youth Organisation. It also denounced members of the international community who are supporting some of the opposition parties such as the National Democratic Force (NDF), which is formed of some former members of the NLD who rejected the party's call for a boycott. ([DVB 20 September 2010](#))

17 September 2010

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9 September 2010

Students Barred From Having Cameras at Sittwe University

Students have been banned from holding cameras in Sittwe University compound by university authorities in order to prevent them from sending photos to exile media and emocratic activist in exile. "We have been unable to take cameras to Sittwe University at present. The authority has seized the cameras from students if they take them to the university. Many students have lost their cameras after bringing them to the university. The ban is intended to prevent students sending photos of the university to exiled media and activists," a student said. The prohibition came about after some photos related to Sittwe University were published on a website and journal of exiled media during the student protest that took place in Sittwe last month. "There is no public notice at Sittwe University that cameras are not allowed, but authorities have been seizing cameras whenever they see students with them" the student added. At least ten cameras have been taken by university authorities. Another student from Government Technical College said that the college authority also does not allow students to bring cameras to the GTC. Despite the ban, students have still been holding cameras and MP3 devices secretly inside the GTC compound, he said. Speaking to Narinjara over the phone, a senior student at Sittwe University said, "Many student protests have taken place in the last few years at Sittwe University and the Government Technical College. News of the protests were picked up by exiled media, and exiled radio shows also aired reports of the protests. Because of that, the authority is worried about the spread of news from the schools and has imposed many restrictions at the university and college." ([Narinjara 9 September 2010](#))

Lawyers

There are currently at least 12 lawyers detained in prison. There is no news to report in September.

Individual Activists

There are currently 602 activists detained in prison.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

It was announced this month that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will be released 13 November, a week after the election, when her term of house arrest is up. The Nobel Peace laureate has been locked away for 15 of the past 21 years. Her latest term of house arrest ends 13 November, timing that analysts say is hardly coincidental. There is wide speculation the junta will release her to appease the international community after the elections.

21 September 2010

Suu Kyi Awarded

She may have been detained, silenced and barred from all political activity in Burma, but Aung San Suu Kyi's struggle for democracy was recognized on Monday when she received en absentia an honorary individual membership title from the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD). On the sidelines of the UK Liberal Democrats annual conference currently being held in Liverpool in England, a plaque was received on Suu Kyi's behalf by well-known Karen activist Zoya Phan, the international coordinator of Burma Campaign UK. CALD's executive committee previously decided to bestow the honorary individual membership title to Suu Kyi at its meeting held in Makati City, the Philippines, on June 29, 2010. She is the first person to be awarded such a title by the organization. In a press release on Monday, CALD said, "In bestowing the honorary individual membership title to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, CALD once again affirms its unwavering support and solidarity to the people of Burma in their continuing struggle for justice, freedom and democracy." ([Irrawaddy 21 September 2010](#))

17 September 2010

Suu Kyi's Mentor Dies

Thakin Ohn Myint, regarded as Aung San Suu Kyi's mentor as well as her father's colleague and confidant during Burma's struggle for independence, died peacefully at his home in Rangoon on Friday morning. He was 92. During the past two decades of military rule in Burma, the veteran politician was well-known for his role as an aide to Suu Kyi. He co-chaired the National League for Democracy's (NLD's) humanitarian committee which offered financial and moral support to political prisoners and their families. As a former comrade of independence hero Aung San, he maintained a close friendship with Suu Kyi's mother Khin Kyi and the family. He shared his thoughts and opinions openly with the future NLD leader during her many visits to Burma in the 1970s and 80s, and was undoubtedly one of her greatest political influences. As a former prisoner himself, Thakin Ohn Myint was a natural choice for the NLD when it began its assistance program to political prisoners and their families in 1995. In the last years of his life, he joined a handful of other veteran politicians in working for national reconciliation. Fellow inmates at Insein Prison recall a memorable quote from Thakin Ohn Myint in 1990: following the election there were rumors that the junta would soon give up power and release all political prisoners. Ohn Myint flatly dismissed the rumors and responded to the other prisoners saying: "The junta will not give up power that

easily. Sometimes the opposition is simply like a fish on the junta's hook." ([Irrawaddy 17 September 2010](#))

6 September

Negotiate with Cease-fire Groups: Suu Kyi

Detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi says she wants the military regime to negotiate with ethnic cease-fire groups for a better future in Burma, according to a spokesman who met with her on Saturday. Nyan Win, who was a senior official in the disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD), met with Suu Kyi in her Rangoon home, where she is under house arrest, accompanied by lawyers Kyi Wynn and Khin Htay Kwe, on Saturday. Nyan Win told *The Irrawaddy* that they also discussed the lawsuit against military junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the appeal of Suu Kyi's 18-month extension of her house arrest. On March 23, three NLD leaders—Nyan Win, Tin Oo and Aung Shwe—attempted to file a lawsuit with the Supreme Court to sue the chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, for issuing "unjust and unfair" election laws. But an official at the Supreme Court handed the documents back, responding that the court did not have the power to handle the case. Responding to Suu Kyi comments about ethnic groups, Sai Sheng Murng, a deputy spokesman for the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), said that if the regime seeks to resolve the border guard issue dispute with violence, it will hurt the livelihood of local residents. "If the regime is honest, it has to accept negotiations with all armed cease-fire groups," he said, adding that the stand off is growing more tense. The SSA-S has not received any offer for talks, according to a spokesman. Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Karen National Union (KNU) General-Secretary Zipporah Sein said, "Without solving political problems, the potential conflicts will not go away." Suu Kyi was sentenced to an additional 18 months house arrest for violating the terms of her detention after US citizen John William Yettaw visited her lakeside home on May 3, 2009. At the time, she had already spent more than 14 of the past 20 years in detention. Her sentence is set to expire in November. ([Irrawaddy 6 September 2010](#))

Other news

The arbitrary and violent nature of suppression facing the people of Burma was evident in the two incidents this month: the summary execution of two young men, shot dead by soldiers in Pegu division and the violent attack on villagers, by soldiers in Indine Military district.

14 September

Executions Common in Ethnic Areas

A case of two young men killed by Burmese government soldiers in Pegu, lower Burma, has attracted criticism at home and the notice of senior UN envoy Tomás Ojea Quintana, but similar incidents of murder and abuse occur regularly in eastern Burma, activists say. Aung Thu Hein, 22, and Soe Paing Zaw, 18, were shot dead by soldiers outside a local restaurant in Pegu after a dispute with officers from the Southern Command's Infantry Battalion 59. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana said he would include the deaths of the two men in his report to the United Nations General Assembly in November. Sources in Pegu said the killings were done execution-style. Local medics said Aung Thu Hein's body was riddled with six bullets while Soe Paing Zaw had been shot four times. Hseng NOUNG from Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) questioned how many times Burmese soldiers had committed similar acts with impunity in remote areas, such as ethnic states, if they would murder people in the downtown streets of a relatively large city like Pegu. "Under the rule of dictatorship, there is no safety for people, especially for those who live in isolated areas," she said. "Their lives are at risk. This is especially true for women who suffer higher rates of human rights abuses." According to a October 2009 report by the humanitarian relief organization, Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), the northern Karen area and

southern Shan State in eastern Burma have the country's highest rates of human rights abuses, including murder, torture, extortion, displacement, forced relocation and land confiscation. TBBC, an umbrella organization of NGOs and humanitarian agencies that assists Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees at the Thai-Burmese border, said that between August 2008 and July 2009 some 120 communities were destroyed, making a total of more than 3,500 villages and "hiding sites" in eastern Burma that have been destroyed or forcibly relocated since 1996. In its 2008 report, TBBC also stated that the total number of IDPs in eastern Burma is likely to be well over half a million with at least 451,000 people estimated to have been displaced in rural areas alone. Due to the lack of information flow and the difficulty of media access, many human rights abuses and crimes committed by the Burmese government forces will go unreported, said Hseng NOUNG. Aye Myint, an activist in Pegu, said, "The situation for people who suffer from abuses is hopeless. They have nowhere to go for help." Observers say the state-run Burmese media often report violent acts such as bombings, but there is never any word about action taken against government soldiers. On Tuesday, *The New Light of Myanmar* reported that two bomb explosions had left two people seriously injured in Pegu Division three days before. The government blamed ethnic armed groups for the attacks. The state-run newspaper also reported on Sep. 11 that a hidden landmine had exploded at a power grid pylon in Thaton Township. The government claimed the act was timed to coincide with the recent killings in Pegu. Aye Myint said that the claim is groundless. He said that educated Burmese people and activists should help protect civilians and should disclose such criminal cases to the world. The international community should also put effective pressure on Burma to stop such acts, he added. ([Irrawaddy 14 September 2010](#))

Woman and other villagers beaten by soldiers

AAPP received information detailing a violent attack on a woman in Indine Military district on 1 August. The woman, Ma Pane, was severely beaten by soldiers. The soldiers came to her house looking for her brother, Mon Lay, who soldiers had beaten after a verbal confrontation earlier that day. At about 6:30 in the evening, Maj. Zaw Zaw, the battalion commander of 605 artillery and captains came to her residence, along with an estimated 50 soldiers with a military vehicles; artillery haulers, holding guns, iron bars and bamboo rods. She was badly beaten by the soldiers and her house broken into and property destroyed and three roosters killed. After that, all villagers were rounded up and ordered to sit on the road and soldiers beat more villagers

Exclusion of ethnic areas from voting

A significant development encroaching on the free and fair nature of the elections was the announcement, in September that minority areas will be excluded from elections. It was announced in Burmese media, on 16 September, that a number of areas in five ethnic-minority states would not participate in upcoming elections as conditions are not in place for a "free and fair". State radio and television listed around 300 villages across Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mon and Shan states that would be excluded participating in the election. In Shan state, four townships will now not take part. The announcement said: "The multiparty general election on 7th of November 2010 will not be held in the following places as there is no condition to hold a free and fair election" and then listed the areas involved. A concern initially raised with the electoral laws was the power of the Election Commission to suspend the election in a constituency, or part of a constituency, where election preparation is "not

possible due to lack of security.” It was thought this could lead to the suspension of political rights under the guise of “security,” particularly in areas of armed conflict. While there was no specific mention of security concerns in the recent announcement, the states involved are home to insurgent groups, including the Kachin Independence Organisation, Shan State Army and the Karen National Union. Amongst the excluded areas notable townships included the border town of Myawaddy, and nearby Kawkreik in Karen state. Pangshan, capital of the Wa autonomous region and Mongla in the Kokang area, both near the Chinese border.

Key International Developments

The body of states supporting the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry into the perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma is steadily expanding. In September, France officially pronounced its support to the probe, followed by the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Ireland. However the European Union, a major actor on the international scene, remains silent as its member states remain unable to unite their voices. At the same time, the inaction of the UN is troublesome. Its only step in the past month was yet another vain call from Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for the junta to release political prisoners, while the commission of inquiry was left as a floating idea. It is very unlikely, to say the least, that Burma will release any political prisoner any time soon, particularly after the regime received in September a friendly pat on the shoulder from the government of China, who told the international community to remain out of the junta's internal affairs.

28 September

UN gets nod from China over Burma pressure

Burma's looming election will not be credible unless the military rulers release Nobel prize-winning opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a UN ministerial group said Monday. The group – which included ministers from neighbours China and India, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia as well as Britain and the United States – “clearly reiterated the need for the election process to more inclusive, participatory and transparent,” UN chief Ban Ki-moon said after the meeting. “Members called for steps to be taken for the release of political detainees including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. “This is essential for the election to be seen as credible and to contribute to Myanmar's [Burma] stability and development,” Ban told reporters after the meeting of the Friends On Myanmar group. No Burmese government representative was at the meeting, held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Ban met Burma's foreign minister, U Nyan Win, at the UN headquarters on Sunday though. “I conveyed my strong wish and expectation that this election should be conducted in a fair, transparent and inclusive manner,” Ban said of his meeting with the minister. He also pressed for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the past two decades under house arrest. Burma has banned her National League for Democracy and nine other opposition parties from taking part in the 7 November election, Burma's first in two decades. The opposition has said the vote will be a sham. The junta has said however that Aung San Suu Kyi will be allowed to vote. Ban said the run up to the election will be “critical” and that the ministerial group called on Burma to take “a more constructive and forward-looking approach” with the international community. He added that the ministers, from countries with widely varying attitudes to Burma, “reiterated their commitment to work together to

help Myanmar address its political, humanitarian and development challenges, in parallel and with equal attention. "The group also reaffirmed unity of purpose and action to encourage Myanmar to make further efforts towards national reconciliation and democracy." The United States and European Union have sanctions against Burma. But China has shielded Myanmar from UN sanctions while India hosted Burmese junta leader Than Shwe on a state visit in July. "At this critical stage in Myanmar's transition, it is all the more important that the group, and especially Myanmar's neighbors, encourages Myanmar to engage meaningfully with my good offices," Ban said. The UN chief has expressed mounting frustration with the Burmese junta in recent months. The government has even refused a visit by his chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar. "We have been trying to visit, somehow this year. It has not been possible. I expressed my regret about that fact," Ban told reporters. The secretary general has also urged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes Burma, to take a tougher line on the junta over the elections. He warned ASEAN leaders on Friday that if the election was not seen as credible it "could reflect on ASEAN's collective values and principles." Ban said he would again press ASEAN and Burma at the regional group's summit in Hanoi next month. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will also be there. A UN rights envoy has called for an investigation into whether the junta's treatment of opponents represents torture that could lead to a crimes against humanity case. Ban said that any action would have to be decided by UN members. Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in the last election in 1990 but the junta never allowed her to take office. ([DVB 28 September 2010](#))

28 September

Calls for UN inquiry on Burma human rights

There is growing international support for a UN Commission of Inquiry to be established to investigate crimes against humanity in Burma. France, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand are the latest of ten countries to give their support. The formation of an inquiry was recommended by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma in March. The human rights organisation, Amnesty International, says the European Union is likely to submit a draft resolution to the United Nations general assembly next month.

([Radioaustrila 28 September 2010](#))

27 September 2010

UN Chief Calls for 'Fair, Transparent and Inclusive' Burma Election

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for a "fair, transparent and inclusive" vote in Burma, as that country prepares to hold its first elections in 20 years. Mr. Ban also reiterated his call for the release of all political prisoners in Burma, or Myanmar as it is also known - including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Mr. Ban spoke to reporters after a meeting of his Group of Friends of Myanmar. Mr. Ban said the coming month will be "critical" as Burma prepares for the November 7 vote. He said members of the group discussed ways to intensify their efforts to help the government and people achieve a "successful transition toward a credible civilian and democratic government." "Members of the group expressed their encouragement, concerns and expectations regarding the current processes," said Ban Ki-moon. "They clearly reiterated the need for the election process to be more inclusive, participatory and transparent." "Members called for steps to be taken for release of political detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he said. "This is essential for the election to be seen as credible and to contribute to Myanmar's stability and development." The Secretary-General also called on Burma's neighbors to use their influence to encourage meaningful engagement. The United Nations has been unable to send an envoy

to meet with Burmese authorities this year. Mr. Ban said he has expressed his "regret" about that, and that he hopes he will have an opportunity to continue his dialogue with Burmese officials when he attends the ASEAN summit in Hanoi next month. ([VOA 27 September 2010](#))

27 September

UN chief piles pressure on ASEAN

UN chief Ban Ki-moon has warned Asian nations that their credibility could suffer if they do not take a tougher line with the Burmese junta ahead of a national election in November. Ban exhorted the military government's neighbours to do more ahead of a meeting on Burma on Monday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. The meeting will discuss human rights, and humanitarian conditions, as well as preparations for the 7 November election, which Britain, the United States and Canada have said will be held in "oppressive" conditions. The UN secretary general has expressed mounting "frustration" with the junta, which has stopped Nobel prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi and other opponents from standing in the election. Ban told leaders from the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Friday that the UN and the group "share the aim of stability and development in Myanmar [Burma]. "We agree on the critical need for a democratic transition and national reconciliation, and for ensuring free, fair and inclusive elections." But he added: "Failure to meet these expectations could undermine the credibility of the process – which, in turn, could reflect on ASEAN's collective values and principles." Ban said the UN and ASEAN "must also help Myanmar, so that they can address these humanitarian and development challenges." ASEAN – made up of Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – has a strong principle of non-interference in members' affairs, but Burma has been a source of embarrassment for more democratic members of the bloc. The UN chief said he wanted to work with the military government "to enable a successful transition to civilian and democratic rule" and called on ASEAN to show support "in encouraging Myanmar's engagement with my good offices." He highlighted the issue in individual talks with ASEAN leaders in New York, including the new Philippines President, Benigno Aquino. Ban pressed on Aquino "the importance of engagement by the countries in the region," a UN spokesman said. Ban has increasingly thrown his usual caution to the wind in his comments on Burma. Already this month he has "expressed his frustration concerning access to the Myanmar authorities" and noted with "some concern" the junta's decision to ban Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and nine other parties from the election. "The international community is at something of a loss over how to propose a way forward with the intransigent Myanmar government," said one UN Security Council diplomat. "The UN secretary general is just reflecting that. The rights situation is bad, even everyday life is bad for many people there." US President Barack Obama also pressed the 10 ASEAN nations at a luncheon he hosted for them the same day. Washington has admitted it is also disappointed with efforts to use dialogue to promote democratic change. "The president believes in the importance of democratic reform and protection of human rights and renews his call on Burma to embark on a process of national reconciliation," a US statement said after the lunch. Obama called for the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi. ([DVB 27 September 2010](#)) The ASEAN leaders also called for free elections, and welcomed US engagement with Myanmar, hoping it would encourage the military government to undertake political and economic reforms.

25 September 2010

Ireland weighs in on UN inquiry into Burma abuses

Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowen's Irish government has joined a growing list of European Union and other countries voicing support for a UN inquiry into crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by Burma's ruling junta. In an e-mail sent to Mizzima in which it was confirmed Ireland supports such a UN commission of inquiry, Irish

Department of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Amanda Bane wrote: "We remain actively engaged at national, EU and international level in monitoring the situation in Burma and in our efforts to support the Burmese people in their struggle for democracy and human rights." Bane, also told Mizzima that it was the view of Dublin that at this point "there are no indications" that the Burmese regime had responded to calls by representatives of the Irish government "for the release without delay of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and for the initiation of a process of national dialogue and reconciliation, involving all opposition and ethnic groups, in advance of the elections". ([Mizzima 25 September 2010](#))

21 September 2010

Dutch, New Zealanders back UN inquiry on junta abuses

The Netherlands and New Zealand have today joined what is becoming a procession of countries calling for a UN inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese ruling military junta. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has confirmed to Mizzima that its minister, Maxime Verhagen, was "indeed supportive of calls for a UN commission of inquiry on human rights violations in Burma". In an e-mail to Mizzima, Jetty Kouwen, a senior policy officer at the ministry's Southeast Asia and Oceania department, said that the Netherlands "will work closely with all other partners, within the EU and outside" to advance the cause of an international inquiry. Kouwen also told Mizzima that Verhagen "deplores the fact" that Burma's military regime had recently ordered the dissolution of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). She added that Verhagen believed the action taken against the NLD "shows that the elections to be held on November 7 cannot be free and fair". The Burma Campaign New Zealand (BCNZ) reported today that its government had also come out in support of an investigation into Burma abuses. BCNZ spokesman Naing Ko, a former political prisoner, was quoted in a statement as saying that his organisation "welcomes the government's decision to support [a] commission of inquiry. We urge other nations to do the same and pledge their support for the establishment of a commission of inquiry in the UN General Assembly resolution on Burma this year". ([Mizzima 21 September 2010](#))

20 September 2010

Acquino Asked to Support UN Inquiry into Junta War Crimes

A leading international rights group, Human Right Watch (HRW), called on Philippines President Benigno S. Aquino III to support the establishment of the UN-created International Commission of Inquiry for Burma. In an open letter send by the New York-based rights group to President Aquino, the HRW said, "We urge the Philippine government to join other states to publicly support the establishment of an International Commission of Inquiry for Burma and to actively engage on behalf of a UN resolution that will make it happen." "We encourage you to raise this issue within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which could be accomplished at the US-ASEAN summit later this week in New York," said the letter. In the letter, the HRW also asked President Aquino, "In your inaugural address, you said that 'there can be no reconciliation without justice. When we allow crimes to go unpunished, we give consent to their occurring over and over again.'" This rings particularly true for Burma, where abuses by the military government, as well as by armed ethnic minority groups, have gone unpunished for decades. "In promoting human rights in Burma, you would be following your mother's lead. Former President Corazon Aquino stood strong for justice in Burma," said the letter. ([Irrawaddy 21 September 2010](#))

20 September 2010

UN inaction on Burma war crimes 'unjustifiable'

It is time for the UN to investigate the consistent reports of mass human rights violations in Burma to enable the identification of those responsible. The failure to take this step is

unjustifiable. For decades NGOs and UN actors have documented reports of extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, torture, mass internal displacement, sexual violence, the use of child soldiers and forced labour, and the list goes on. The scale and gravity of the violations reported strongly suggests that they amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. Yet, those who commit these alleged international crimes do so with absolute impunity. This impunity will not end without a UN initiated investigation specifically aimed at obtaining evidence in order both to clarify the true extent of the atrocities, but also to obtain evidence linking an individual to a specific crime in order to establish accountability. Once such evidence has been obtained, it will be a question of whether the UN and the international community will have the necessary political will to bring the perpetrators to justice. There is strong evidence of mass human rights atrocities in Burma. However, NGOs and UN actors face tremendous difficulties in obtaining the evidence from victims and others in Burma. It is imperative that a Commission of Inquiry is established by the UN. In the event that a Commission of Inquiry was established there is every reason to believe that it would obtain evidence of mass international crimes. The inevitable question that would arise once the Commission identified the perpetrators and obtained sufficient evidence would be: will the international community bring the perpetrators to justice? It is impossible to answer this question conclusively. If a UN Commission of Inquiry was initiated it would not be a lack of evidence that would prevent trials of alleged perpetrators of mass human rights atrocities in Burma; rather a lack of the necessary international political will by the UN and its member states. ([DVB 20 September 2010](#))

17 September 2010

France joins calls for UN inquiry into Burma abuses

French representative Jean-Baptiste Mattei expressed at a UN Human Rights Council meeting last Friday his government's support to "establish an international commission of inquiry" on human rights abuses in Burma. Aung Din, executive director of rights group, the US Campaign for Burma, welcomed France's stance. "[The] French coming on board is a positive development," said the former political prisoner. During the meeting several countries including Norway, the US, Ireland, Switzerland and Japan expressed concern about the human rights situation in Burma, the treatment of ethnic minorities and the much-criticised national elections. During its allotted right-of-reply time, the Burmese regime fired back against the charges, claiming, "that the allegations against Myanmar [Burma] were completely false and unfounded. There were no crimes against humanity in Myanmar and the government had negotiated ceasefires with 17 of the 18 rebel groups. The military only conducted counter-insurgency activities and not acts of military aggression. With regard to the issue of impunity, any member of the military who breached national law was subject to legal punishments. The Myanmar governmental authority said that there was no need to conduct investigations in Myanmar since there were no human rights violations there." The Burmese regime representatives at the meeting were likely very pleased when China, used its time to make reference to the French government's recent wave of deportations of Roma (formerly known as Gypsies) back to Romania and Hungary. Other nations present at the meeting that put up a vigorous defence against charges of human rights abuses were North Korea and Iran. ([Mizzima 23 September 2010](#))

17 September

US Will Continue Engagement Policy After Election

Despite two rounds of failed dialogue with the Burmese military regime and the recognition that its engagement policy has made little if any progress in improving conditions inside Burma, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said on Thursday that the Obama administration would continue its policy after Burma's Nov. 7 elections. "We have been in close consultations with all our friends in the region about our intentions which are to keep the door open, work towards a comprehensive dialogue with the

regime, and follow on with its successors with the recognition that it is among all the difficult options the best possible way to go forward,” said Campbell. His comment followed his remarks on the “Next Steps in Engaging the Asia-Pacific Region,” and were in response to a question by Priscilla Clapp, the former Charge d’ Affairs for the US Embassy in Burma, about what policy the Obama administration would follow after the elections in Burma. “We are faced with a predicament. I think everything today suggests that the November elections will be without international legitimacy—no observers, none of the internationally accepted norms, steps that one wants to see before this election that is taking place,” Campbell said. He added, however, that “It is also the case that the period after the election might create new players, power relationships, new structures inside the country. We think we need to stand by and see how that plays out.” “We think that it is going to require a combination of some pressure and some rewards if progress is to be made. We are prepared to act in both cases,” said Campbell, who has been instrumental in shaping the Obama administration’s policy on Burma and who has led the US in the two rounds of talks it has had with the Burmese regime since the Obama administration announced its policy of simultaneous engagement and sanctions. “When the Obama administration came to power, I think there was a desire to look closely at what our approach had been to Burma. After an extensive review, in which we consulted stakeholders, non-profits and governments in the region as a whole, I think we came to the conclusion that both the kind of open engagement strategy of Asean [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] without any particular downside and the policy of sanctions by the United States had failed to accomplish its goal of change inside the country,” he said. “So with the full support of the administration, we embarked on a dialogue with Burma on a range of issues. I think it would be fair to say today that the dialogue has been disappointing and it has been very challenging,” Campbell said. The United States had sought some specific steps from the junta in terms of the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the commencement of a domestic dialogue within Burma, the fairness and inclusiveness of the Nov. 7 elections and the receipt of assurances about the regime's strategic relationship with North Korea. “Now it would be fair to say that in almost every arena, we have been disappointed in what we see today,” Campbell said. ([Irrawaddy 17 September 2010](#))

16 September

UN chief has ‘some concern’ over NLD, critics seek more

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon “notes with some concern” the Burmese junta electoral watchdog’s decision to dissolve 10 parties including the National League for Democracy led by detained Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, according to a statement released by his office yesterday. He also once again called on the Burmese regime to “ensure that November’s elections are fully inclusive”, the statement said. The statement echoes what critics have called the “weak” approach that has become synonymous with Ban’s tenure. It came several hours after a daily press briefing in which journalist Matthew Russell Lee asked the secretary general’s spokesman, Martin Nesirky, several pointed questions about Ban’s stance regarding the dissolution of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and what Ban’s interim Burma envoy, his chief of staff Vijay Nambiar, actually does.

16 September

Role of envoy Nambiar unclear; UN reporter wonders if he does anything at all?

In an official transcript of yesterday’s press briefing in which Matthew Russell Lee – an accredited correspondent at the United Nations for Inner City Press – specifically asked about the present UN Burma special envoy, many questions were left unanswered as to whether Ban’s interim envoy Nambiar was actually doing anything. The following portion of the transcript from the UN website shows how far Ban’s spokesman Nesirky goes to avoid answering questions about the role of the envoy: Inner City Press: What’s the involvement of Mr. [Vijay] Nambiar in the good offices and what does the Secretary-General hope to come

out of the meeting of the Secretary-General's Friends on Myanmar in the upcoming general debate? Spokesman: Well, I think you're fully familiar with Mr. Nambiar's good offices role related to Myanmar. The Group of Friends meeting, which would be at ministerial level, is likely to be on 27 [September]. Further details are being worked out on that, including press availability, and I think at that point, after the meeting, you'll be able to find out the content of the meeting. Inner City Press: Just about Mr. Nambiar, because I'm actually not clear on what the office does. I wanted to know, on something like this, did they know in advance that this decision was being made by the Government? Had they spoken to the NLD about these concerns or are they just reacting to the stories about it? I don't mean that insultingly, I just mean, I'm just trying to get a sense, did that office try to forestall this decision by the Government, or are they as mystified as everyone else? Spokesman: Well, there are a couple of things here. Mr. Nambiar has support, people who are obviously able to help him, who are monitoring this daily, the whole time. Therefore, they will clearly have been aware of movements. What the diplomatic process might entail, I'm not in a position to say. I would reiterate what the Secretary-General himself has said. He's expressed his frustration here on the access to the Myanmar authorities to talk about these kinds of things, so I think that might answer your question. ([Mizzima 16 September 2010](#))

16 September

Ban Concerned about NLD Dissolution

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed "concern" over the Burmese military junta's move to dissolve 10 political parties in the run-up to the November general election.

"The Secretary-General notes with some concern the decision by the Union Election Commission to dissolve 10 political parties prior to the general election, including the National League for Democracy and four others for failing to renew their registration," Martin Nesirky, a spokesperson for the secretary-general, told reporters at his daily press conference at the UN headquarters in New York on Wednesday. "He [Ban] further notes that the Union Election Commission has issued campaigning guidelines for the remaining 37 parties to register to contest the elections," Nesirky said in response to a question. The secretary-general once again urges the Burmese authorities to ensure conditions conducive to a fully inclusive and participatory electoral process, he said. Nesirky said that a ministerial-level meeting of the Group of Friends of Myanmar is expected to be held in New York on Sept. 27 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Details of the meeting are still being worked out, he said. Responding to a question about the role of the UN Good Offices, Nesirky said the developments in Burma are being closely monitored by the team of officials in New York. The UN spokesman added that Ban has expressed his frustration concerning access to the Burmese authorities. Meanwhile, an eminent American scholar on Asian affairs on Wednesday warned the international community that they would be committing a mistake if they focus on encouraging the military junta to hold free and fair elections in November.

"The central focus of the international community should not be free and fair elections," said David Williams, the John S. Hastings professor of law at Maurer School of Law, Indiana University, and director of the Center for Constitutional Democracy. "Instead, it should be seeking ways to encourage the Burmese government—both the military, which will still hold real power after the election, and the new civilian office-holders—to undertake sustained dialogue with all of the country's stakeholders, especially its ethnic minorities," he said. Williams said that the Burmese military junta has ensured that its hand-picked candidates will win in November by imposing restrictions on opponents, including expensive filing fees, tight deadlines and limits on who can be on the ballot. While the elections may produce a civilian government, the constitution allows the military to declare a state of emergency, dissolve the government and seize power legally, he said, adding that even if the civilian government has real authority, that would not address the ethnic divisions that lie at the heart of Burma's decades-old civil war. "The only path to true change for Burma—trilateral dialogue among the government, the democratic opposition and the minorities that

have been fighting for a measure of self-determination,” Williams said. ([Irrawaddy 16 September 2010](#))

15 September 2010

UN war crimes probe ‘still just an idea’

No movement has been made by the UN on an investigation into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity by the ruling junta in Burma, a UN spokesperson has said. Quintana’s proposal “is not something that’s gone beyond an idea”, Farhan Haq, deputy spokesperson for UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, said last week. “Mr. Quintana has proposed that idea. Whether anybody takes that up is up to the various bodies of the UN system.” Asked by a reporter what the next step would be, he replied: “Ultimately, the bodies of the UN system, including the Human Rights Council, can consider Mr. Quintana’s views and see whether any further steps need to be taken.” Han said in August that he was “not aware of any of the [UN] bodies...taking up this particular issue”. ([DVB 15 September 2010](#))

13 September

Thai AICHR Rep Calls for 'Open Doors' in Burma

The Burmese military government should accept the UN’s proposed Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma if the regime wants to prove it has transparency, said a Thai representative at an Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) on Monday. Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on the sidelines of a seminar at Chiang Mai University attended by some 70 participants, the main speaker, Sriprapha Phetmeesri, who is the Thai representative at AICHR, said the Burmese government should open its doors for the CoI to investigate crimes that have allegedly occurred, especially in ethnic areas in eastern Burma, in order to prove its willingness to cooperate and show transparency. Sriprapha said that she supported the establishment of a CoI, an idea initiated in March by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana. It has already received support from Australia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Canada, the UK and the US. Sriprapha said she had already told the UN Special Rapporteur that the CoI should not only be comprised of people from outside the region, but that some experts from within the Southeast Asian region and those who have knowledge about Burma should also be involved. London-based Amnesty International recently said that any inquiry should focus on reports of widespread and systematic persecution by the Burmese government forces against the civilian populations of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Arakan State, the ethnic Shan minority in Shan State, and the ethnic Karen minority in eastern Burma. According to a 2008 report by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, an umbrella group of donors and humanitarian organizations, the total number of Internally Displaced Persons in eastern Burma is likely to be well over half a million with at least 451,000 people estimated to have been displaced in rural areas alone. Sriprapha said Burma’s human rights record will be a challenge for the rest of Asean members as they aim to complete the establishment of an Asean community by 2015. Despite the Asean members raising concerns and calling on Naypyidaw to hold free and fair elections in November, Sriprapha said she worried that Burma will not take the calls too seriously. “The Asean members have been voicing these concerns. But I don’t know how much attention the Burmese government is paying,” she said. She said, “It would be good if independent observers are appointed who could monitor the election process in Burma.” However, she noted that did not hear of any consensus among Asean members about sending election observers to Burma. She said she doubts change will come to Burma after the election as the current government ministers and officials have formed a party to contest the election. Earlier, the secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Surin Pitsuwan, welcomed the upcoming election in Burma, saying, “I hope that Myanmar will prove the skeptics wrong and Myanmar will respond positively to the appeal for freedom of

mobility and expression during the lead-up to the elections scheduled for 7 November.”
([Irrawaddy 13 September 2010](#))

13 September 2010

Burma Wins Key Support from China

Burma's ruling military paid tribute to China after a five-day official visit by the junta chief, saying Beijing gave its assurance that it will not support any group that carries out anti-government activities along their shared border. Snr-Gen Than Shwe's trip to China last week and his red-carpet welcome by President Hu Jintao was not reported in Burma until he returned home. On Sunday, state-run media devoted several pages of photographs, articles and praise to China, the junta's main ally and crucial source of diplomatic and economic support. Burma's tightly controlled media stopped short of saying Beijing had given its backing for controversial November national elections. China's president "expressed thanks for the clarification of the plans for the elections and progress in Myanmar [Burma], adding that he fully believed (the) Myanmar government would achieve success in development and the transition process," it reported. Than Shwe's visit appears to have cleared tensions that emerged last year when fighting between Burmese forces and ethnic groups sent tens of thousands of refugees across the border into China, resulting in a rare warning from Beijing.

([Irrawaddy 13 September 2010](#))

10 September

Open Letter from ex-political prisoners from Burma

The Ex-Political Prisoners of Burma have joined together in an unprecedented call for help from the international community ahead of the elections in Burma set to be held on November 7. The Ex-Political Prisoners, now living in camps on the Thai Burma border, fear forced repatriation from Thailand to Burma after the election and are desperately seeking assistance that is currently unavailable from the UNHCR for a safe haven, if only temporary, in a third country. The Ex-Political Prisoners currently have limited access to UNHCR to claim refugee status due to policy agreements between UNHCR and the Royal Thai Government. The fear is that the Thai Government could repatriate all refugees back to Burma after the November 7 elections on the basis that the elections have created a legitimate Government in Burma. The Ex-Political Prisoners claim that the election will be a sham. Many potential candidates have been banned and Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. ([The best friend 10 September 2010](#))

7 September 2010

China says Foreign Governments Should Not Interfere in Burma's Election

China says the international community should avoid interfering in Burma's November elections. The call comes at the start of Burma's military leader Than Shwe four-day state visit. As Beijing prepared to welcome Burma's Senior General Than Shwe, the Chinese Foreign Ministry rebuffed international criticism of the close ties between the two Asian neighbors. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said that Burma is a friendly neighbor to China. She went on to say that Burma's election in November is an internal matter. Jiang says countries critical of Burma's government should refrain from what she describes as any negative impact on its political process - especially during the run-up to the elections. Jiang says General Than Shwe will meet Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao while in the country. She says the visit will further cement the already close ties between the neighbors. Human-rights groups have criticized China over its support for Burma. Most developed nations have imposed economic sanctions on the government because of its poor

human-rights record, but China has never done so. Regional political analysts say on this visit General Than Shwe will seek continued economic and diplomatic support from Chinese leaders. China is now Burma's third largest trading partner and investor after Thailand and Singapore. Bilateral trade totaled \$2.9 billion in 2009. ([VOA 7 September 2010](#))

3 September

Canada to support UN inquiry on Burma abuses

Canada's Conservative government led by Stephen Harper will join the growing list of Western nations that have called on the United Nations to launch a commission of inquiry into human rights abuses in Burma, a Canadian foreign ministry spokeswoman said.

Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon had faced increasing domestic and international pressure to endorse a Burma inquiry following the Obama administration's mid-August announcement that it would do so. "Canada supports both the UN special rapporteur's work on human rights abuses in Burma, and the idea of a UN commission of inquiry into human rights abuses by the Burmese regime," foreign ministry spokeswoman Catherine Loubier said, quoting Cannon, who was referring to the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana. "We will work with our allies in the international community to develop a common approach to support the recommendations that the rapporteur will present to an upcoming session of the UN General Assembly," she added. In March, Quintana, reported to the UN Human Rights Council that in Burma there existed a pattern of "gross and systematic" human rights abuses that suggested the abuses were state policy that involved authorities at all levels of the executive, military and judiciary. It also said the "possibility exists that some of these human rights violations may entail categories of crimes against humanity or war crimes under the terms of the Statute of the International Criminal Court". He urged the UN to look further into rights abuses committed by the Burmese regime and consider launching a "commission of inquiry with a specific fact-finding mandate to address the question of international crimes". Each of the three opposition parties represented in the Canadian federal parliament issued press releases over the past 10 days demanding that Canada back such an inquiry. On August 25, a crowd of Burma supporters led by Zoya Phan of the Burma Campaign UK gathered in front of the Canadian embassy (officially known as the High Commission) in London to protest Ottawa's tardiness in endorsing such an inquiry. Heralding the Canadian government's decision, Tin Maung Htoo executive director of the Ottawa-based Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB), in a statement thanked everyone who followed the CFOB's request and pushed the Harper government into coming out in favour of an inquiry. "I would like to thank all supporters across Canada and around the world who worked together to make this happen," he said. In addition to Canada, the list of countries that have stated support for a UN inquiry on Burma are the United States, Britain, Slovakia, Australia and the Czech Republic.

2 September

Tutu raises a hand for Suu Kyi

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has leant his hand to a campaign to free Burmese opposition icon Aung San Suu Kyi and some 2,170 fellow political prisoners. The prominent South African activist and cleric joins a number of international leaders and hundreds of former Burmese political prisoners who are photographed with their hand raised and palm open in the form of the Buddhist Abhaya Mudhra, a symbol of fearlessness; on their palm is written the name of a current Burmese political prisoner. "For me, Honorary Elder, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the living symbol of the Burmese people's hope and courage. She is the embodiment of their determination to live in freedom, health and prosperity. That is why I have written her name on my hand," he said. Both he and Suu Kyi, who has spent 15 of the past 20 years under house arrest, are members of The Elders, a 12-strong group of eminent global leaders that include Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter and women's rights activist Graça Machel. The campaign,

led by Amnesty International, is inspired by the work of James Mackay, an award-winning British photojournalist who has photographed some 160 former prisoners for '[Even Though I'm Free I Am Not](#)'. He told *DVB* that Tutu's involvement in the campaign is "incredibly important – he has a voice that can reach millions across the world", adding that his presence will "generate huge public interest" and shed further light on Burma as it prepares for controversial elections on 7 November. "Having someone – world leaders, politicians, celebrities – take part in this campaign is vital: they are making a physical, tangible statement of intent and belief by standing alongside the very people who have suffered so badly in Burma's jails." Amnesty's campaign invites anyone sympathetic to the plight of Burma's political prisoners to join up by photographing themselves as Tutu and others have done. "The more we work with human rights activists around the world, the more we become aware of the impact a simple message of solidarity can have," a statement on the organisation's website says. ([DVB 2 September 2010](#))

1 September

British FM Says Burmese Junta Must be Held Accountable

British Foreign Secretary William Hague says Burma's military leaders must be held accountable for their human rights violations. In a letter to the advocacy group Burma Campaign-UK, Hague said Britain had not ruled out a United Nations commission of inquiry into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the military regime. Hague's government has joined the US, Australia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in support the establishment of a UN commission of inquiry. There is an ongoing debate about how best to make the generals accountable for human rights abuses, Hague said. He said the British government continues to press for a more robust international approach. Human rights abuses in Burma would remain a high priority for Britain, he added. "The government will continue to work with the EU and other international partners, including Burma's neighbors, to press for an end to human rights abuses," Hague said in the letter, which was sent to Burma Campaign-UK on Aug. 24. "The [British] government will always stand on the side of victims of oppression such as the people of Burma," he added. The Burma Campaign-UK forwarded to the British government some 1,400 letters in June concerning Burma's human rights abuses. The British government is very conscious of the strength of feeling in the United Kingdom about Burma, Hague said. ([Irrawaddy 1 September 2010](#))

CONCLUSION

As the elections draw closer, violations of civil and political rights in Burma are escalating as many rights groups expected. Those targeted in the past for challenging the regime are targeted again, particularly, students, monks, and activists involved in 1988 pro-democracy uprising and the 2007 Saffron Revolution.

Through Burma's state-run media, the regime has warned 'subversives' that anyone who disrupts the country's election could face up to 20 years in prison; they have reminded people that the 1996 Law on the Transfer of State Responsibility is still in force, a law that provides up to 20 years imprisonment for anyone who "incites, delivers a speech or makes oral or written statements that undermine the stability of the state, community peace and tranquility and prevalence of law and order."

Peaceful campaigning and dissent are increasing in opposition to the elections. In September, 11 students were arrested for anti-election campaigning, distributing leaflets calling for people to boycott the elections. The authorities have also seized cameras from students from Sittwe University, and have banned cameras on campus in an attempt to prevent students

from taking pictures and sending them to exiled activists and media. In Rangoon, the military strengthened restrictions on monks to prevent them from staging protests in commemoration of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, as well as campaigning against the elections. A monk was sentenced to 15 years in prison for voicing opposition to the elections.

The third year anniversary of 'Saffron' provides an opportunity to reflect on the political prisoner situation. The number of political prisoners in Burma, having doubled after the peaceful demonstrations in August and September of 2007, continues to grow. There are now more than 2193 political prisoners behind bars.

The elections are prompting much discussion about the potential release of political prisoners, either before or directly after the elections. This month the regime mentioned they would release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi shortly after the elections. She is due for release then, anyway, as her sentence finishes on 13 November. In the past the SPDC have used the release of political prisoners as a ploy to satisfy the international community. If the regime was genuinely interested in change it would have already released Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Khun Htun Oo, and other important political and ethnic leaders and allowed them to freely contest the elections. Unless the regime unconditionally releases all political prisoners, any releases, while good news for the individuals and their families, must be seen for what they are: a ploy to ease international pressure, and not an indication of newly found commitment to human rights.