

New Leadership Brings New Abuses Following Uprising at Myaung Mya Prison

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State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) officials' overhaul of staff at a prison on the Irrawaddy delta in Burma following a demonstration there last year has perpetuated the abuse of prisoners that first occurred following the initial crackdown on protesters. Demanding basic rights, prisoners demonstrated outside their cells at Myaung Mya Prison on the evening of August 18, 2003.

After prison authorities and military troops fired warning shots at the demonstrators, Chief Director of the Prison Department Ba Myint went to Myaung Mya Prison to investigate. Ba Myint told the prison community, "Prisoners who demonstrated will not be punished. I will provide for the needs of prisoners as soon as possible, but prisoners also have to live peacefully under prison rules and regulations." He also said the uprising was the result of prison authorities' misrule and abuse of power. Irrawaddy Divisional Director Win Myint's history of harsh treatment of prisoners following unrest, often contrary to proper jail procedures, is well documented. In 1998, as head warden at Tharawaddy prison, he suppressed a demonstration where political prisoners who had completed their prison terms but hadn't been released demanded the release of all political prisoners who had served their sentences. Aung Kyaw Moe died in prison after a cruel beating administered following the demonstration.

As head warden at Insein Central prison in January 2001, where he sent NLD elected representative Toe Po, NLD members, and students who demanded prisoners' rights to the "Dog Cell," a cell notorious for severe punishment, and beat them for a solid month. Win Myint made cosmetic moves to address the problems at the prison. He named Chit Ngwe as the new Warden, Ngwe Paw as the new jailor, and new prison staff for Myaung Mya Prison.

However, the abuse continued despite the change in leadership. Win Myint and the newly appointed administrators harassed and tortured prisoners who had participated in the demonstration. It was reported that many of those who ran the prison drank heavily and refused to follow proper procedures or apply guidelines laid out in their jail manual. On September 21, 2003, Ba Myint and Win Myint, jailors, over one hundred wardens, SPDC troops, and police raided the prison and shackled all prisoners who took part in the demonstration. These prisoners were beaten severely all day. All wards and cellblocks were closed and then every prisoner at Myaung Mya was also beaten. On September 23, 2003, 85 prisoners and prison officers and wardens on duty during the demonstration were transferred.

On October 11, Win Myint returned to Myaung Mya Prison and beat prisoners for one week. On December 13, he arrived and beat prisoners a third time. Officers Ngwe Paw and Maung Pyone and Corporal Myo Lwin, handpicked subordinates of Win Myint, willingly participated in these inhumane beatings. Some prisoners paid bribes to escape the beatings.

Director Win Myint himself went and beat Phyo Min Thein, Phone Thet Naing with a bamboo rod, accusing them of not sitting in proper prison position. Zin Bo (a.k.a) Tin Myint was also beaten, shackled, and put in solitary confinement because the authorities held a grudge against him over a prior dispute. Htoo Htoo Eel and Jame Hpaw Wah, Karen ethnic Article 17 (1) prisoners, were also beaten, shackled, and put in solitary confinement because they complained to Win Myint that they were not provided enough food.

Soe Thiha, sentenced to death under Article 122 (1), was also beaten, shackled and put in solitary confinement for alleged verbal spats with other prisoners. Win Myint ordered Ngwe Paw, Maung Pyone and Myo Lwin to put a bamboo rod coated with fish paste into the rectum of Shwe Kyin, who had led the demonstration by shouting slogans. He also refused to say, "I'm frightened" during beatings. Win Myint sat and witnessed these sadistic acts from beginning to end. Having been beaten severely, Thein Oo from Ward 3 passed away days later in the prison hospital.

Aung Ko Lay from Labutta Township was disabled and suffered mental illness from the beating. Tote Tote, Htay Htay and Than Than from the women's ward were taken to Main Jail, accused of supporting the demonstration, and beaten until they fainted.

Theik Oo, who was assigned to paint the prison office as an outside board worker and accused of trying to escape, was beaten, shackled, and put in solitary confinement in special cell block No. 3. Kalar Gyi fainted from fright upon hearing Win Myint would do weekly rounds at the prison on December 13, and was sent to an outside hospital but passed away from the wounds he had suffered during the beatings. Prison doctor Khin Zaw witnessed the beatings and death of Ko Kalar Gyi. Authorities silenced everyone present regarding Kalar Gyi's murder, including Khin Zaw. The resultant harsh treatment and suffering of prisoners continued long after the uprising. On March 24, 2004, Zin Bo from special cellblock 3 complained to authorities that he didn't have enough drinking water. Warden Chit Ngwe took him to the main jail of Myaung Mya Prison and beat him with bamboo rods, accusing him of treating authorities impolitely. Officer Ngwe Paw himself punched and shackled him.

On April 4, 2004, political prisoner Yi Mon vomited and almost fainted because authorities ordered prisoners to take bath in the afternoon under the burning sun. Upon examination, the doctor said he had heart disease but did not provide any required medicines.

On April 18, 2004, political prisoner Aung Myo Tint suffered dizziness after taking a bath and informed authorities. He was not examined until 18 hours later. The prison doctor told him he had coronary heart disease, but he was not given any needed medicine. He had to take his own medicine brought by his family. Zaw Htoo, Ye Min, Kyaw Sein, and Aung Naing Zaw suffered from hypertension. Sarkalay suffered from lung disease. And Phone Thet Naing suffered from spondylitics. They demanded that authorities not require them to bathe in the sun during the hottest time of the day but were denied.

On April 22, 2004, 100 elderly female prisoners were transferred from Insein to Myaung Mya, overcrowding Myaung Mya.

On April 26, political prisoner Daun Mon died of an aneurysm after bathing. Some prison staff have expressed resentment regarding Win Myint's brutish behavior and failure to respect state laws. He reportedly swears and shouts at prison superintendents in public. When he inspects prisons, he never asks about prison conditions or prisoners' health. Instead, he asks only if there are any wooden leg blocks. If not, he orders to make wooden leg blocks at once.

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