

Cries From Insein

by Win Naing Oo

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1.1 Structure of the Prison

By Win Naing Oo

The prison is laid out in an octagonal design, with the halls located radially like the spokes of a wheel. There are two rows of brick walls around the prison. The external wall is higher about 20 ft in height, compared to the internal wall which is about 10 ft in height. There is also another prison known as the 'attached prison' which is joined to the main prison. The term 'Insein' is used to refer to both prisons. In order to enter the prison, it is necessary to pass through three thick iron doors in the entrance building. The Chief Warden of the prison lives on the upper floor of the building at the entrance. In the centre of the prison is the main prison office, and also the central tower. Taken in a clockwise direction, starting from the entrance building, the buildings in the prison are as follows (see the enclosed sketch of prison):

1. Entrance building (main iron gate of jail)
2. Female hall no. 1
3. Solitary-confinement cell-blocks (there are six cell-blocks in compound)
4. Hall no. 1 (a two-story building, for detainees who are facing trial)
5. Hall no. 2 (a single-story building, also for detainees who are facing trial)
6. Hall no. 3 (for prisoners who have already been sentenced)
7. Special Hall

8. Hall no. 4 (for prisoners who have already been sentenced)
9. Hall no. 5 (for prisoners who have already been sentenced)
10. Kitchen hall
11. Hospital
12. Store
13. Prison office (reports and data on prisoners are kept here)
14. Female hall no. 2, including cell-blocks for women in solitary confinement
15. Attached prison
16. Office of the Prison Director-General (the head of all prisons in Burma)
17. Workshops
18. Dog-cell A.

Solitary Confinement Cells

There are six solitary-confinement cell-blocks. Each cell-block has many tiny cells (8 x 10). Each cell is shared by 3-5 political prisoners (since there are not enough cells for all the solitary-confinement prisoners, several prisoners are often kept together in these tiny cells). Prisoners in these cells are allowed to leave the room to wash and bathe for 15 minutes per day. Toilet buckets are cleaned every day.

No 1- Solitary confinement block 14 cells

No 2- 60 cells (including death row)

No 3- 14 cells

No 4- 30 cells

No 5- 22 cells

No 6- 10 cells

B. Other ordinary halls Each hall (25 x 440) has eight cells and has its own vegetable plots, one in front and one behind. Each vegetable plot is about fifty percent larger in area than the building itself.

C. Dog-cell The dog-cell is for the punishment of prisoners who commit a crime or who dare to complain about unjust treatment by prison authorities. (Previously, well-trained military dogs were kept in this cell, but there have been no dogs since 1988. Most of the worst atrocities take place in this cell. (See also 4. 1)

D. Special cell block This cell-block is only for very important political prisoners. It has 10 cells. Political prisoners who have stayed or are staying in this cell block are:

1. U Win Tin (Secretariat member of NLD)
2. U Khin Maung Mynt (Chairman of Peoples' Progressive Party)
3. U Thet Khine (Main underground network network leader of CPB)

4. Min Ko Naing (Chairman of ABFSU)

There are four small houses in front of this special cell block. Political prisoners who have stayed in these small houses are:

1. U Tin Oo (Former Chairman of NLD)
2. U Kyi Maung (The Chairman of NLD following U Tin Oo)
3. U Chit Khine (Secretariat member of NLD)
4. Kim Min Chu (North Korean Operative) E.

Workshops

There are many workshops in the prison. Prisoners are forced to work long hours weaving, sewing (clothes and shoes) and working in the carpentry sections there.

1.2 Numbers of Prisoners

Hall no. 1 has two stories. There are normally over 2,000 prisoners kept there. The other four halls always contain over 1,000 prisoners each. There are routinely 400-500 political prisoners kept in the six solitary confinement cell blocks in the compound.

Thus the total estimated number of prisoners is:

Five ordinary halls 7,000

Six solitary confinement cell blocks 500

Female hall 500

Hospital 200

Attached prison 1,000

TOTAL 9,200

The number of prisoners in Insein prison varies slightly according to the situation. However, there are always 9,000-10,000 prisoners there. The solitary confinement cell blocks contain only political prisoners, all of whom are charged under section 5-j, but the rest of the political prisoners are mixed with criminals in Halls no. 3, 4 and 5. Each ordinary cell block always contains over 200 political prisoners.

Accordingly, the estimated numbers of political prisoners are:

6 solitary confinement cell blocks 500

3 ordinary cell blocks 700

Female hall and cell block 200

Attached prison 200

TOTAL 1,600

1.3 Prison Administrative Body

Chief Warden (Chief Supervisor of jail) One crown and two stars

Warden of jail 1 (Senior Supervisor) One crown and one star

Warden of jail 2 (Junior Supervisor) Three stars

Sr. Jailer (Senior prison officer) Two stars

Jr. Jailer (Junior prison officer) One star

Sergeant Major
Sergeant
Corporal
Lance Corporal
Warder

The positions above are listed in descending order of rank. All positions are filled in Insein prison, but some of these ranks are vacant in other prisons in Burma. In addition, there is another authoritarian body made up of prisoners appointed by the prison administrative body:
Tan See Gyoke: The most senior person among prisoners.
Tan See: The most senior prisoner in a hall.
Akhan Lu Gyi: The most senior prisoner in a cell.
Akhan Sa Yei: Cell clerk; one in each cell. Varyar: The lowest level of these prisoners to manage security in cells, bathing and latrines.

The Tan See Gyoke and Tan See are criminals such as prominent gangsters and are appointed by the prison administrative body for this reason. All prisoners are very scared of them. A few prisoners become Akhan Lu Gyi by paying a bribe to the prison officials, but most of them are appointed because they are ruthless and brutal.

Rights of Prisoners and Violation of these Rights

2.1 Prison Instruction Cell

By Win Naing Oo

In principle, this cell is for teaching prisoners the regulations that they have to obey. (It is called Poun-san Khan which in Burmese means 'model cell,' literally translated.) These cells are included in every prison in Burma. All prisoners are very afraid of this cell, even when they have only heard mention of it.

There are two forms of model cells in prisons:

- (1) For detainees who are under trial; and
- (2) For prisoners who have been sentenced.

Everyone who has been sentenced to imprisonment has passed through both these cells. They teach prisoners the regulations of the prison and the four different standard positions for prisoners. These four standard positions are:

1. Sitting cross-legged with arms straightened out and both fists on knees, holding the body absolutely vertical with the face downward. This position is for roll-call and for inspections by prison officials.
2. A squatting position with arms straight on the knees, with straight back and head down. This position is an emergency position to be adopted if a prison official passes through.
3. A standing position with head down and hands crossed over groin. This position is for walking past or standing in front of prison officials.
4. Standing on tip-toes with the knees bent at 45 degrees, a straight back and hands clasped behind the head with the face raised. This position is used for punishment. Prisoners are always beaten and kicked while in this position.

Even though these 'model cells' are only for the purpose of teaching the standard positions for prisoners, they are in reality the site of some of the worst abuses of prisoners.

In the big hall, the Akhan Lu Gyi and their associates order the prisoners to sit in standard position number one, and to loudly recite the prison regulations. Meanwhile, the chief of this model cell and his subordinates swear at and physically intimidate prisoners by walking around them and brandishing sticks (solid and hard bamboo), crops made from three pieces of intertwined cane, and leather belts.

If the voices of the prisoners reciting the prison regulations are not in harmony, these Akhan Lu Gyi and other criminal prisoners go among the prisoners and start beating and kicking them. Even if the recitation is in harmony, they will usually use some excuse to beat the prisoners. If one prisoner is out of step, all the other prisoners are also beaten at the same time. Sometimes 14-15 men go among the

prisoners and beat and kick them, cursing the whole time. They order the prisoners to sit in the standard position for many hours.

Because of this, the prisoners sweat heavily and eventually get very sore, stiff backs. As they have to hold their heads down for many hours, prisoners suffer dizziness, and some become unconscious. But none dare to move while in the standard position as they are all scared of being beaten and kicked. The Akhan Lu Gyi and his followers say that even if a snake passes in front of them, the prisoners have to always remain without moving; even if the snake bites them they have to die without moving.

Because of this kind of treatment, all the prisoners are afraid of these cells. The successive military governments keep these cells with two main aims:

(I) To break down morale

The detainees feel terrified, depressed and inferior during this period. When these detainees become prisoners, all are too afraid to complain against any inhuman and unjust treatment in the prison, but instead put up with it and become accustomed to it.

(II) To extort money from the prisoners

During the brutal torture, some subordinates of the Akhan Lu Gyi of these cellstell the prisoners that if they want to avoid being tortured and harassed, they need to pay money. If a detainee agrees to pay money, he will not be tortured at this time or in the future. These subordinates pick on the detainees who appear to be able to pay more, the obvious intention being to get more money.

After reaching such an agreement, the detainee has to ask money from his family members on the day of his trial, and try to arrange for the money to be smuggled into the prison.

In this way, the daily income of the Akhan Lu Gyi is about 10,000-20,000 kyats, which is twice the annual income of doctors and engineers. This money is shared with the higher prison officials. Consequently, all of the prison officials become richer.

Because of this, prison authorities turn a blind eye to the abuses which take place in these cells. In effect, they seem to be encouraging it to continue. Even if there are cases of prisoners being over-tortured, the prison authorities try to cover it up to protect the Akhan Lu Gyi. If there is no alternative, they blame the Akhan Lu Gyi, saying that he was responsible for the case. On such occasions, the senior prisoner of the cell always takes full responsibility for the problem, but he will usually just be moved to another hall.

(In principle, according to the jail manual, no prisoner has

the right to beat another prisoner for any reason.)

2.2 Health Situation

There is only one hospital in each prison in Burma. A prisoner has the right to receive medical treatment. Every prisoner can go to the prison hospital to have their illness treated. This is in accordance with the jail manual.

However, the hospital provides no medicine except some kinds of temporary analgesic and antipyretic, such as Paracetamol. There is only one doctor at the prison hospital. The doctor neither examines patients nor prescribes medicine for them; these tasks are carried out by other prisoners, who have only an extremely rudimentary knowledge of medical matters (taught to them by the prison doctor). The prison hospital is always dirty and the sanitation is very poor.

All medicines from the prison hospital are smuggled out of the prison and sold in the markets outside. Thus, only very cheap medicines (such as Paracetamol, Buspro, etc.) are left in the prison hospital and there is always a lack of necessary medicines. All the prisoners are really scared of becoming sick as there are no proper medicines, no appropriate treatment and no care. Some rich prisoners get the medicines they require from relatives or other visitors. The hospital confiscates almost all these medicines, leaving very little for the patient. Confiscated medicine is then sold at the market. If a complaint is lodged with the prison authorities, it is more usual for them to issue an order banning the bringing of all medicines to the prison rather than to stop the confiscation. As prisoners fear that this kind of order will affect all the other prisoners, no one lodges a complaint about it.

Furthermore, the hospital does not admit patients unless they give a bribe to the prison doctors; otherwise they are admitted to the hospital only when they develop serious complications, but by this time it is usually too late and most die. On the other hand, if the bribe is paid, they will be immediately admitted to the hospital and treated well. This is just another way of extorting money from the prisoners, as the doctor only takes care of patients who can pay money. Therefore, prisoners who are unable to pay money are very afraid of being admitted to the hospital, because they know that they will probably die there.

The hospital has some beds but they are always occupied by 'pretend patients' who pay money to the prison doctor so that they can sleep in the hospital beds. These pretend patients are also allowed to stay in the better and cleaner cells of the prison hospital. Real patients who cannot pay the bribe do not have access to the hospital beds or good cells but rather have to stay in the corridor or in the toilet and store areas which are very unhygienic and smell

offensively.

The prison hospital provides no sheets and no blankets for patients. If a prisoner has their own blanket they can use it, but otherwise none is provided. There are no appropriate medicines provided; no regular checks by doctors; no proper diagnosis; no proper treatment; no assistance or care of any kind for the patients. Therefore, most of the patients who are admitted to the prison hospital die there. Even if they survive, all end up suffering from malnutrition and become very thin.

This neglect in prisons has contributed to the high death tolls of prisoners. When a prisoner dies of medical mistreatment or neglect, no action will be taken against the doctor, and no relatives of the victim will bring charges against him as the prison authorities will not allow this to happen. This has been an unspoken norm in prisons. Prisoners themselves consider this yet another abuse of human rights.

The prison hospital takes very good care of those who bribe them dearly. The hospital buys medicines from outside if required for the prisoners. If need be, they are often transferred to a good hospital outside.

There is a special meal for patients known as hospital food different from the ordinary food for prisoners. It consists of a cup soup with a cup of meat curry twice a day, for lunch and dinner, of cow's milk and an egg for breakfast. However, this ration exists only on paper, and in practice patients never receive it. The hospital food rations are only enjoyed by the pretend patients who have given money to the prison doctor. These pretend patients need to pay 3000-5000 Kyats to the prison doctor (compare this to the normal official salary of at a government hospital, which is 1250-1500 Kyat per month).

Nobody dares to protest against this corruption in the prison. If they do protest, they will be charged with opposition to the prison authorities.

The most common diseases among the prisoners are: gastrointestinal diseases (amoebic dysentery, bacillary dysentery and diarrhoea), jaundice (viral and amoebic hepatitis) and skin diseases. The sources of transmission of the infection are poor sanitation, a lack of personal hygiene (particularly because of poor water supplies), unclean and semi-cooked food, dirty kitchens and polluted surroundings.

Owing to drug abuse, there is also a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in prisons. Prisoners are always afraid to get injections in the jail hospital because of AIDS. When administering injections, the doctors give only half or less than half of the phial to one patient, giving the rest to

another patient from the same needle and syringe, this almost guaranteeing that any blood-carried infections will spread. This means that the doctors can get away with using less medicine per patient.

The situation for political prisoners is worse. Political prisoners never give bribes to the prison authorities. They all reject this practice, in order not to tarnish their political dignity. Besides, there is a directive government to prisons to treat the prisoners as unjustly and brutally as possible. So the prison hospital authorities ignore the health condition of the political prisoners. The health care system for political prisoners is really very poor and they are always neglected.

Because of late admission to hospital, mistreatment, a lack of medicines and no care for patients, the following prisoners died in the prison hospital. The majority of deaths were due to dysentery. All of them were prominent political prisoners from Insein prison.

1. U Sein Win (Kha Yan township)
2. U Tin Maung Win (a member of parliament, NLD)
3. Bo Set Yaung
4. U Soe Win (younger brother of Bo Zeya, one of the Thirty Comrades)
5. U Khin Maung Nyunt (Chairman, PPP)
6. U Man Dawait (Former student leader, Ta Ka Tba)
7. U Nyo Win (Joint-General Secretary, PPP)
8. U Thaw Ka (Ex Maj of Burma Navy, author, NLD CEC member)
9. U Cho Gyi (CEC, Ma Na Ta)
10. U Soe Win
11. U Myint Oo (NLD Chairman in Kamayut township)
12. U Bo (KNU, NYaung Lay Pin township)
13. Kyaw Myo Thant (Democratic Party for New Society, Bogalay township)
14. Mohamed Ilyas (alias Maung Nyo)
15. U Zaw Tika (an abbot)

This is only a selected number of well-known prisoners; there are many other ordinary prisoners who have also died in prisons without any notice being taken. If any of these victims had a chance to receive treatment outside the prison, they would have survived. These horrific incidents take place in Burmese prisons because of corruption, abuse of authority and disrespect for prisoners as fellow human beings by the prison officials.

2.3 Food for Prisoners

All prisoners receive two meals, one in the morning and another in the evening. These meals consist of:

For the morning meal rice, pea curry and fish paste.

For the evening meal rice, talapaw (vegetable soup) and fish paste.

For the special meal once a week, the prisoners are given

meat.

The rice given to prisoners is the lowest quality available in Burma. The pea curry consists of a few yellow peas boiled in a large volume of water. Almost all the peas from the curry have already been removed by the prisoners in charge by the time meal time arrives. This leaves only pea-water for the other prisoners.

Talapaw curry (vegetable soup): a small amount of various vegetables are put into a large urn, and then boiled with too much water. The soup always contains foreign matter such as small insects, leeches, sand and some very tiny pieces of stone.

Fish paste: a little fish paste mixed with salt, sand and tiny pieces of stone. A prisoner gets only one teaspoon of fish paste for one meal.

Meat: beef, pork or fish. Every prisoner gets a small piece of meat (about a one-inch cube) once a week. This is half the amount stipulated in the prison manual. Good parts of the meat are usually kept by the prison authorities and then sold to prisoners. For example, when given fried fish, prisoners are provided only with the heads and tails. Prison officers never use all the allowance money when they buy meat and fish, but keep some for themselves.

Of course, if a prisoner has some hidden money, he can buy pea soup and meat or exchange it for his clothes. Because of all this corruption, the food quota of the prisoners is decreased by half. In this way, the majority of prisoners are underfed and have to go hungry all the time.

2.4 Bathing

Bathing is allowed once a day, and clothes may be washed once a week.

The size of the water-trough is about 80 ft x 20 ft and it is divided into two parts. The small part is about 20 ft long and contains drinking water. However, the prisoners appointed to the authoritarian body can use as much of this water as they like for bathing. Ordinary prisoners are allowed to bathe at the large section of another trough. At bathing time, prisoners line up on each side of the trough and fetch water for bathing. The order in which prisoners must line up is decided by the authoritarian prisoners. If the prisoners do not wash in time with one another, the prisoners in charge beat them with hard bamboo sticks [the prisoners must wash like a military parade; they are given an order to scoop out water, and must all do so in unison]. The prisoners are allowed to use only shallow dinner plates to scoop water for bathing. They can use no more than ten plates of water each. Sometimes, if the prisoners in charge are displeased, they allow prisoners only eight dishes of water. At other times,

prisoners are allowed fifteen dishes of water, but this is rare. Prisoners who bribe those in charge with money or clothes are allowed to bathe for as long as they like. Because of the small amount of water provided, most prisoners suffer scabies and other skin diseases associated with poor sanitation.

2.6 Prisoner Complaint Session

Every week, the chief warden of the jail does his rounds and checks to see if the prisoners have any complaints or demands regarding the rights they are allowed as a prisoner. All high officials in the prison, including prison doctors, have to accompany him on his rounds.

However, if prisoners verbally report their grievances to the chief warden of the jail, later they will be punished for some reason or other contrived by the prison authorities. Before the chief warden makes his rounds, jail officers ask the prisoners what complaints they have. Prisoners raise some complaints, but if the jail officers have decided against some complaint being made to the chief warden, the prisoners may not make it. They have no way to complain. They do not dare to take the risk of making a complaint against the wishes of the jail warden. If someone bravely complains to the chief warden, ignoring jail officers, he will have action taken against him (though ostensibly for another unrelated reason) and will be beaten by the jail officers later.

No prisoners dare to complain about the atrocities, harassment and unjust treatment they receive. The prison officers in any case deny the existence of the problems about which the prisoners may complain. But the prisoners can request some minor rights.

The following is an example of a conversation with the chief warden:

Jail officer: Do you have something to complain to the chief about?

Prisoners: No, Sir! (It is the answer that the chief warden wants to hear) (He asks the same question three times)

This is the extent of the question and answer sessions during the rounds of the chief warden. All the prisoners always feel very dejected during the chief warden's rounds; they have to wait for him for nearly two hours, in the standard position, sitting or standing silently on a hard concrete floor.

Corruption in the Prison

By Win Naing Oo

The following are the usual complaints in the prison:

1. If a prisoner does not want to sit in the standard position while he is in the model cells, he will be beaten and will have to pay at least a thousand Kyat to prison authorities as a fine. (see also section 2.1)
2. A prisoner has to pay some money to the Akhan Lu Gyi of the hall if he wants to have a good sleeping place when he reaches the cell after being sentenced.
3. A prisoner has to pay further money to jail officials if he wants to avoid beatings by senior prisoners. If he pays this money, he will be regarded as close to the prison authorities and will not suffer regular beatings.

In one case, a prisoner who was related with a famous ruby-smuggling case is said to have paid 100,000 Kyat to the head prisoner of the hall, Aung Gyi. This case became well-known and Aung Gyi was transferred to another place, a hard labor camp at Somprabon in Kachin State as a punishment.

4. A prisoner has to pay some money to a responsible person if he wants to get a good position in the jail, such as helping as a worker in the detention office, jail office, office of the main jail, office of hall supervisor, food store, or if he wants to become an Akhan Lu Gyi or a clerk in the hall. (These places have no strict regulations and prisoners who work there have a special chance to obtain some money. To get these positions, prisoners must pay 5,000-10,000 Kyat to prison officials.)

There are workshops in the prison for such things as carpentry, shoe-making, and cloth-weaving, where prisoners are forced to work. To avoid having to provide labor (including having to plant vegetables), a prisoner has to pay some money to prison officials. Other prisoners are forced to work for extremely long hours in such workshops.

5. Every prisoner is afraid of being sent to a hard labour camp in a remote area. Labour camps are the places where prisoners receive the harshest treatment because of the severity of the work load, the ruthlessness of the officials, malnutrition, poor accommodation, improper medical care and the remoteness of the forest locations where malaria and dysentery are common. Every prisoner considers it to be the same as being sent to their death. If they do not want to go there, they have to pay from 3,000 Kyat to 5,000 Kyat to prison officials.

The majority of prisoners who cannot pay bribes to prison officers are sent to Kyauk Gyi hard labour camp, where they must break rocks. This place is infamous for its high death tolls of prisoners. Due to extreme fatigue and constant torture, some prisoners have committed suicide, by jumping from the top of the mountain. In 1991 there was an outbreak of gastrointestinal disease in that camp, but no medicine was provided and dozens of prisoners died. The dead bodies were buried in a mass grave on the spot.

Among the hard labour camps, some are better than others. The better camps include pig-breeding camps, the Rangoon-Mandalay Expressway construction camp and Min Gon camp. In Min Gon camp, some entertainment such as videos is provided for the prisoners. If a prisoner wants to stay in one of these camps, since all prisoners are required to go and work at a labour camp, they have to pay 10,000 Kyat or more to prison authorities.

6. If a prisoner smuggles money into the prison, he has to pay a commission to the warder. Then he has to give more of the money to the warder in order to obtain food, medicines and other commodities.

7. According to the jail manual, prisoners who are patients in the hospital can receive milk and eggs for breakfast and soup and meat for lunch and dinner. However, if a prisoner has no money, it is impossible to get these special meals because they are unable to give any kind of bribe to the prison authorities. As mentioned above (section 2.2), the prisoners who can offer 3,000-5,000 Kyat monthly to prison doctors are all allowed to stay in the prison hospital as if they are patients and are treated like real patients.

Punishment in Prison By Win Naing Oo

The following are the usual punishments in the prison:

1. Cancellation of visiting rights;
2. Beating;
3. Beating and transferal to a new and unfamiliar cell block;
4. Solitary confinement.

4.1 Solitary confinement

A 1.5-2 foot long iron rod is placed horizontally between the shackled legs of prisoners, forcing them to stand permanently with legs astride.

There are no blankets or mats; prisoners have to sleep on the bare concrete floor. They are locked in a tiny cell during this period and have no chance to wash.

Normally, small chamber pots and urine pots are put in each

tiny cell. These pots are not emptied, so the cell gets wet, becomes very dirty and smells offensively after a while. Nobody wants to be put in these cells because of the bad smell. Food is slid in from the outside of the cell through the iron bars. Every day, the prisoner is taken out of the cell, forced to stand in position number 4, and beaten. The period of solitary confinement usually lasts for at least one month, and may last up to three months.

The worst type of solitary confinement is when a prisoner has to stand with both arms tied above the head. The prisoner has to defecate and urinate while standing. The authorities feed them no rice but give them only glue made from rice.

4.2 Types of beating

The following are the usual types of beating:

1. The prisoner has to stand and embrace a post and is beaten while both hands are held firmly by another person;
2. The prisoner is beaten while lying prone on the ground
3. The prisoner, both legs chained, is made to stand in standard position no. 4 and is beaten
4. The prisoner is beaten while being forced to crawl along the ground
5. Prisoners are shackled and a long iron bar is placed so that their legs are splayed. They are then forced to crawl along the ground and are beaten
6. Prisoners are forced to do squat-jumps (like in the game of leap-frog) and are beaten while doing so.

When the authorities beat the prisoners, they do not avoid any part of the body, whether it is the face or chest or back. They routinely kick the chest, abdomen, face and back with military boots. They also jump on the backs of the prisoners who are crawling along the ground.

4.3 Implements used for beating prisoners

The following are the usual implements used for beating prisoners:

1. Leather-coated pipe
2. Wooden stick
3. Stick made from three interlaced pieces of cane
4. Solid bamboo stick about 3-4 ft in length
5. Hard plastic water pipe

Prison authorities never beat the prisoners in accordance with the jail principles. They over-beat the prisoners very brutally. Because of this, prisoners are often seriously wounded and suffer internal bleeding, fractured skulls, broken bones and internal injuries. They always abuse

prisoners in a way designed to violate their human dignity.

For example: If they ask "Are you afraid?" the prisoner has to "I am afraid of you, shint". Shint is a Burmese suffix used for politeness by female speakers; it is never used by male speakers. Then, the officer asks: "What is your name?" and the prisoner has to reply "My name is Ma Saw Maung (or whatever their name is), shint." Ma is prefixed to the names of younger women; it is also never used by men.

Making the prisoners use these female terms is designed to degrade them. Some prisoners refuse to talk to the officers in this way, like a woman. In this case they are beaten continuously until they comply. Some prisoners are beaten again when they recover consciousness. Finally, some prisoners can no longer stand the suffering and knock themselves unconscious on the stone wall. When prisoners get fractured skulls or severe bleeding, they are finally sent to hospital.

However, once in the hospital the prisoners still do not receive systematic medical attention. If they moan because of pain, they are beaten again and accused of being noisy. Because of such severe and systematic torture, some prisoners suffer gangrene and some have sustained total paralysis for example, Zarni (a member of NLD) and Kyaw Thu (well known for his bravery). The prison officers were not charged in these cases, but were protected by the prison authorities.

Legal Procedures in Prison By Win Naing Oo

Ka Yin Lay was interrogated because he had been accused of hiding a pointed piece of iron in the prison. The Prison authorities asked him to show them the place where he kept it. When he replied that he had no such thing, the authorities started to beat him very violently. They repeatedly demanded that he show them the hiding place. The authorities did not accept his explanation and continued to beat him. Ka Yin Lay bled very severely due to this brutal torture. When he agreed to show them the hiding place, they stopped beating him. However, when they searched the place he directed them to, and did not find the piece of iron, they began beating him again, and asking him the real place. He told them another place, but they still did not find it. So they continued torturing him until he was unconscious. The reason behind this incident was that one prisoner, close to prison authorities, had a quarrel with Ka Yin Lay and given false information to the prison guards. There are many cases like this. Rather than depending on the law, or on prison rules, judgement in prisons depends on the temperament or

emotion of prison authorities.

The main weaknesses of judgement in jail are:

A. The lack of proper investigation into rule infringements
Prisoners are always under the watchful eye of the appointed senior prisoners in a cell. If a prisoner gets on well with them (bribes them with money, food or clothes) then even if that prisoner breaks certain prison rules, he will face no problems. If a prisoner does not bribe them, the prisoner can face unexpected problems with the jail authorities because of some misdemeanor concocted by the senior prisoners. For example the senior prisoners may accuse the prisoner of:

- Trying to escape from the jail
- Smuggling money into the jail
- Inciting rebellion among the prisoners over cases of injustice against them
- Possessing a pointed iron stick [some prisoners keep such sticks, about 1 ft in length, for killing someone when quarreling].

When a jail officer dislikes a particular prisoner, he will sometimes also use this kind of false accusation. Usually, prison authorities come to a decision about such cases immediately, without evidence, and later find witnesses who will support their claims. Even if there is someone who gives evidence in support of an accused prisoner, it will not help, and that person will also be punished. Thus, no one dares to give evidence against the prison authorities in such cases.

When there is a problem, the prison officers conduct a hearing themselves, and no one dares to give evidence in support of the prisoner. After the hearing, they immediately pronounce the prisoner guilty, and punish him.

B. Unfair punishments

If a culprit has a good relationship with prison authorities, the punishment is reduced. Conversely, the punishment will be increased if the culprit is disliked by prison officials.

According to the basic principles of human rights, no punishment should be degrading to human dignity. But there are many purposefully degrading punishments in prison. (Also see 4.)

C. Bias

Judgement is not fair or just. If there is a problem between ordinary prisoners and the leading prisoners, the latter will always be favored. It is the ordinary prisoners who will always be found guilty and punished.

If a prisoner who is very close to the prison authorities

violates the principles of the jail, he is protected by the authorities and escapes from punishment even if he is obviously guilty. At the very least, jail officers reduce his punishment. If there is a witness who can give evidence regarding the case, he will be intimidated by prison authorities so that he does not speak up. Moreover, they persuade other prisoners, by force or by giving favours, to give the kind of evidence that they want.

At one time, a prisoner by the name of Kyaw Thu who got into a fight with another prisoner, was paralyzed from the waist down due to severe beating by wardens, merely because they disliked him. But when another prisoner known as Musa had a fight, he was just transferred to another cell without being beaten up because he was friendly with prison authorities.

The judgements passed in prisons by prison officials are more a reflection of the officers feelings than of the existing laws.

Criminal Prisoners By Win Naing Oo

Criminal prisoners can be divided into two different groups: those who have authority and those who are oppressed.

Among those who have authority, there are two types. The first type is made up of those prisoners who can pay money to prison authorities; the other (referred to as Bo in Burmese) are those who never hesitate kill and are regularly violent to other prisoners. In criminal society the ideology has arisen such that "you must have money or a strong resistance to persecution". (For example, if a prisoner wants to escape from severe harassment, he has to pay money to prison authorities. If he cannot pay, he has to bend his back and prepare for a beating by the warders.)

In the case of an ordinary prisoner beating or killing another prisoner, he will be cruelly beaten by prison authorities and put in solitary confinement. When he is discharged from solitary confinement, he is recognized as a senior prisoner and he becomes a Bo; then nobody dares to insult him. He is also likely to be appointed a senior prisoner. Prisoners from the administrative group do not need to obey the strict jail rules exactly, because they are a privileged class. They can extort money, food and clothes from other ordinary prisoners by oppression, brutality and injustice. In this way, the above mentioned ideology emerges in the prison.

One event happened in a military dog cell involving Tbar Thar, Khin Than and three other prisoners. One night, Mar Thar and Khin Than killed two other prisoners while asleep

with bricks which had been cut around the toilet. There was no hatred involved, and no reason for the killing. The two suspects confessed to killing the two others, but alleged that they had nothing against them and that they killed them because they wanted to avoid hard labour by gaining status within the hierarchy of prisoners. After that, these two prisoners became very popular in Insein prison and were appointed to the prisoner administrative body. This is the usual tradition in Insein. It can therefore be seen that the prison system encourages prisoners to engage in inhuman acts. Thus, those prisoners who want to serve out their sentences peacefully live in constant fear of being killed.

The majority of prisoners are brutally oppressed by prison authorities and the senior Prisoners. They have lost their basic rights. If they try to ask the authorities to respect their basic rights, it is very dangerous for their personal security; they live in fear of their lives while being subjected to the worst possible injustices, minimal food supplies and regular and severe beatings. If they are sent to hard-labour prison camps, prisoners face an even worse situation than in prison. If they want to escape from these problems they have to commit the kind of crimes that Thai Thar and Khln Than did.

Thus, prison life is a cycle of oppression, brutal killing and prisoners conspiring to kill each other. Prison authorities actively encourage this kind of situation.

6.1 Opium and heroin abuse

One prisoner named Nga Shint brutally beat to death another named Mya Khaung, a Tan See (the head prisoner of a cell block), with a mattock. After this, Nga Shint died of a heroin overdose. There are many prisoners like him who have died of heroin overdose.

It is possible to get various kinds of drugs in the prison, for example, raw opium, heroin, concentrated opium oil, marijuana, and diazepam, etc. The main source of drugs in the prison is the prison authorities themselves, but there are also a few prisoners who smuggle a small amount of opium into the prison.

There are two main ways of smuggling drugs into the prison via the prison authorities:

- Direct method
- Indirect method

The direct method is to ask and bribe the prison authorities directly.

The indirect method is for a prisoner to ask a friend outside to send food for the prisoner directly to a prison official at his home. The officer will then pass this food to the prisoner

inside the prison; nobody dares to check food brought into the prison by a prison official. Thus when the official gives the food to the prisoner concerned, the drug will be inside the food.

Some high-level prison officials, and even the director of prisons himself are involved, directly or indirectly, in smuggling of drugs into the prison. For example, when a prisoner who is either close to the director of prisons or has given money to him as a bribe receives visitors, he does so in the presence of the prison director. Nobody dares to check the food or other items given to a prisoner in front of the director. In such cases drugs can be easily concealed inside the items that the prisoner receives. The price for drugs inside the prison is always at least four times higher than the equivalent price outside the prison.

6.2 Homosexual abuse

All prisoners are tortured very severely when they first arrive in prison, when they are learning the prison regulations and the standard positions. At that time the popular criminals and senior prisoners arrive on the scene. If they find any young adults among the newcomers, they call these youths to stay with them. These youths are at first happy as they are not forced to learn the prison regulations and standard positions, and they thus avoid the more severe torture. These youths are even thankful to those senior prisoners, and they are well-fed and have a chance to stay in a good location.

The senior prisoners allow the youths to stay beside them. In the night they abuse them homosexually. First, they try to persuade them to comply. If this does not work, they threaten them with pointed iron sticks. The problem is that these youths are very afraid. If they threaten the prison authorities, the youths are intimidated by death very easy for the senior prisoners to kill other prisoners as they implements to do so.

Those youths who have been sexually abused often become very depressed, and lose their personal dignity. The higher prison authorities turn a blind eye to such cases. The victims also keep quiet because they are ashamed and afraid of being killed.

6.3 Lack of personal security

No prisoner has any degree of personal safety. There are many cases of murder between prisoners, as well as by prison authorities. It is very easy to kill someone. The reasons why it is so easy for a prisoner to kill another prisoner can be summarised as follows:

1. There is an abundance of lethal weapons;
2. There is a lack of proper punishment (not more than three years further imprisonment is given even for a

- murder case);
3. The prison encourages the activities of the senior prisoners and gangsters;
 4. These senior prisoners are always protected from punishment by prison authorities;
 5. Prisoners do not have any avenue of complaint or appeal;
 6. The prison does not take any serious measures to protect the security of the prisoners.

The reasons mentioned above are general ones, but there are many other specific reasons for a lack of security in individual cases which are the result of personal disputes between prison officials.

Take as an example the killing of Be Ou in Thayet prison. This was the result of a dispute between the chief warden and senior jailor.

The senior jailer knew beforehand that Be Ou would be killed soon, but did not take any action, saying that it was just a rumour. If there is a killing case, it will effect the chief warden. This prison officer will have a problem with the higher authorities. The killing of Be Ou happened at the end of 1993. Be Ou was beheaded and his head was dropped into a big pot of vegetable soup. (Also see 9.4)

Political Prisoners By Win Naing Oo

Political prisoners have to stay together with criminals in the same halls where they are in a minority when compared with criminal prisoners. There are normally about 800 criminals and 200 political prisoners in a hall. Political prisoners are very different from criminals in that they always group together and are united. They help and their opinion is same:

- They only obey what they consider as a group to be just and fair prison rules
- They share their food and possessions equally among one another; They assist, protect and take care of one another
- They all agree not to take any part in prisoner administration
- They all agree not to pay bribes to the authorities, even though most of the political prisoners are students and most of their families have good incomes
- They preserve, protect and care for the rights of other prisoners
- They avoid any act which will tarnish their political

dignity.

7.1 Relations between political prisoners and criminal prisoners

Political prisoners have a good relationship with the ordinary criminals. They also help and take care of the criminal prisoners as much as they can. But political prisoners do not have a good relationship with senior criminal prisoners.

Ordinary criminals regard political prisoners as follows:

Prisoners who are jailed because of their endeavors in the interests of the whole population and the country, and not because they committed any crime; respectable people who are jailed for their refusal to accept injustice, their objection to unjust deeds or their stance on the side of the oppressed; and as people who try to protect the rights of prisoners as much as they can, help each other and keep the dignity of political prisoners by not taking special privileges or favours.

In spite of this respect for political prisoners, all criminals are afraid to stay near to political prisoners or have a close relationship with them.

The reason for this is that prison authorities have warned and intimidated the criminals not to associate closely with political prisoners.

The relationship between senior prisoners and political prisoners appears on the surface to be good, but it is not warm. In reality, there are almost always tensions under the surface, and sometimes this leads to direct confrontation. Senior criminal prisoners, like the prison authorities, also regard political prisoners as people who will destroy their interests and benefits and for this reason they dislike them.

Moreover, senior prisoners often intentionally create misunderstanding, hatred and confrontation between political prisoners and prison authorities, by giving false reports about political prisoners to prison authorities, and spreading rumours against the political prisoners. The aim being both to put the political prisoners in more trouble, and to curry favour from the prison authorities. Because of these actions, the relationship between prison authorities and political prisoners becomes even more strained.

7.2 Two attitudes of prison authorities toward political prisoners

The views of prison authorities on criminal and political prisoners differ.

As the prison authorities consider that they can oppress the criminals however they want, there is no particular tension.

The prison authorities bear no particular grudges against the criminal prisoners, like they do against political prisoners.

The first attitude that the prison authorities have toward political prisoners is one of hatred and ill-will. They have negative views about political prisoners, for the following reasons:

Political prisoners never agree with unjust deeds and harassment, and always object to any kind of ill-treatment.

Moreover, they submit protest letters to higher authorities with the help of people outside the prison; they also send protest letters to higher authorities concerning the corruption of prison authorities; they always demand their legal rights as prisoners; they take care of and protect each other. They all respond unitedly and with one voice when one of them is insulted by prison authorities. The prison authorities strongly dislike prisoners uniting in this way.

This is why prison authorities hate political prisoners. They see them a hindrance to the smooth operating of the prison.

The second attitude the authorities have is that political prisoners are antigovernment elements, rebels and an enemy. So, in accordance with the wishes of the military rulers, the prison authorities harass and torture them whenever they get the chance.

Because of these two negative attitudes, the harassment, ill-treatment and torturing of political prisoners has become routine. The prison authorities always regard political prisoners with suspicion, and even their most simple and innocent requests are regarded as politically motivated or as attempts to break prison regulations.

Harrassment of Politicall Prisoners By Win Naing Oo

8.1 The September 1990 Prison Strike

This prison strike, in Imin prison, is the biggest that has taken place during SLORC era, and also led to the most severe punishments. There were many underlying factors which led to this prison strike, but the main reasons are:

1. The mixing of political prisoners with criminals

There are naturally differences between political prisoners and criminals. Criminals are arrested because of a violation of the rights of other people, carried out for their own



Prisoners who were

personal benefit. Political prisoners are arrested for a different reason. They are arrested because of selfless demands, and struggle to get rights for all the people of the country.

These two different types of people are mixed together in prisons. If there is a problem in the prison, the views of these two groups of prisoners will differ, and their approaches to solving these problems will also be different. Usually, criminals would like to solve problems by force, by murder and suchlike, the implements for which are readily obtainable.

2. Non-recognition of political prisoners

Political prisoners reject the fact that they are not recognised as such. They feel this is an insult to their dignity. Even though they have the same status and rights as criminals according to the regulations of the prison, in reality they do not get the rights that the criminal prisoners receive. Political prisoners are even less free in prison than criminal prisoners.

Political prisoners are always closely watched and inspected by prison authorities. They have absolutely no chance to visit other cells or cell blocks. When they sleep, they cannot sleep near one another. Visitors and family members who are allowed to visit political prisoners are thoroughly searched many times. All conversation between political prisoners and their visitors is monitored by prison warders. If more than five political prisoners gather in a group in the prison, it is regarded as a move in defiance of the prison authorities and they are accused of engaging in political activities. Political prisoners are even prohibited from going near the entrance to the cells in which they stay, as the prison authorities worry about them talking to prisoners in other cells.

The situation for criminal prisoners is less strict. They can talk freely, can travel to other cells and cell blocks, and are much more free than political prisoners.

3. Lack of access to reading material

Political prisoners want to read books, newspapers, and material. Even though all books in Burma are strictly censored by the military government, reading material is forbidden for political prisoners. There has always been access to reading material for prisoners every Burmese government except the SLORC.

4. Lack of visiting rights

Refer to section 2.6.

5. Harassment related to changes in the political situation outside the jail

When the NLD election victory was not honoured, and not

badly tortured were:

Female Cell Block

1. Ma Hnin Hnin Hmway (DPNS)
 2. Ma Thida Aye (ABFSU)
 3. Ma Hla Hla Than (DPNS)
 4. Ma Ohruna (ABFSU)
 5. Ma Guan (ABFSU)
- All of them were moved to Tharawadi prison.

Solitary Confinement Cell Blocks

1. Min Zeya (Ma Ka Tha)
2. Yin Htway (DPNS)
3. Win Thein (Three-coloured flag)
4. Yan Myo Thein (ABFSU)
5. Moe Myint (PPP)
6. U Myat Tbu (PPP)
7. Moe Myat Thu (NLD)
8. Aung Zeya (Former DPNS Chairman)
9. Dr Tin Myo Win (NLD)
10. U Ngwe Hlaing (NLD)
11. U Thaw Ka (former Major and author)
12. U Zaw Myo Win
13. U Zaw Pe Win
14. Dr. Khin Htun
15. Aung Zaw Shar (Student from Pegu)
16. Set Aung Naing (Ya Ka Tha)
17. U Ye Htun tDr. Ba Maw's son-in-law)
18. Than Lwin (ABSDF)
19. Mya Aye (former graduate students)
20. Ko Khun Sai
21. Ko Khin Maung Zaw
22. Ko Myo Mint (student)

transferred, more people were arrested and the punishments became more harsh. Political prisoners in the prisons were harassed and oppressed even more than usual. Political prisoners were very frustrated with the conditions in prison and found it very difficult to tolerate them.

Because of these conditions, 40 students from the dog cells made some demands of the prison authorities. They expressed their willingness to discuss these problems with the prison authorities. But the prison authorities refused, swearing at the prisoners and threatening them.

Subsequently, on 18 September 1990, students from the dog cell commenced a hunger strike and informed the prison authorities accordingly. They then announced the following five demands:

1. To allow political prisoners to stay together, segregated from the criminal prisoners
2. To recognize political prisoners as such, and grant them political prisoner status
3. To allow prisoners access to reading materials including newspapers, religious books and other legal reading matter
4. To allow political prisoners full and free rights to receive visits
5. To respect the results of the election and hand over power to the elected representatives.

Prison authorities and prison doctors arrived at the dog cells and acknowledged the hunger strike. Then, they came and confiscated all personal items and food in the dog cells. Later, warders came and smashed the water pots, telling the prisoners their water had been cut. The prison authorities blacked out news of the hunger strike so that it would not spread to other cell blocks. However, even though precise details were not known, news of the strike leaked out to the other cell blocks in the Prison.

After four or five days had passed, some of the students lost consciousness, suffered fits and were then sent to the prison hospital. The others refused to receive medical care and continued the hunger strike.

At that time, there were about 500 political prisoners in the six solitary confinement cell blocks. News of the hunger-strike, such as the number of students from the dog cells that were sent to hospital and the number that had died, reached the solitary confinement cells. Political prisoners from other cell blocks became concerned and prepared to support the hunger strike by also demanding just treatment for political prisoners.

Consequently, prisoners from these six cell blocks, together with those from the female hall began to shout slogans in

23. Nyo Htun (ABFSU)
24. Zaw Zaw Aung (ABFSU)
25. Aung Soe
26. Kyaw Min Yu (a Jimmy (DPNS)
27. Myint Thaug (student)
28. Thein Htay Aung (student)
29. Kyaw Tint (student)
30. Shwe Phone Lu (ABFSU)
31. Htet Moe (student)
32. U Kyin Makmg (NLD)
33. Myo Khin (ABSDF)
34. U Thein Han (CC of NLD)
35. Dr. Aye Chan (Professor of History at RASU)
36. Kyaw Htway (student)
37. Ti Sein Han, (NLD)
38. U Ne Min (BBC reporter)
39. Capt. Sai Wim Kyaw
40. Thet Oo (NLD youth)
41. Ko Thi Ha (Ma Na Ta)
42. U Wi Za Ya (student)
43. Ko Thet Tin (student)
44. Kaung Kyaw San
45. 100 prisoners, awaiting death sentences, from number 2 cell block.

unison, beginning at 7:00 am, on 25 September 1990. The slogans were the same demands that the hunger strikers from the dog cells were making. All the cell blocks echoed loudly with the sound of slogans being chanted.

In spite of this, no prison officials arrived on the scene. No one came and talked to the protesters. There was no discussion between the hunger strikers and the authorities. One hour later, the authorities played music over loudspeakers so that people in other blocks and outside the prison would not hear the chanting of slogans.

At 11:00 am, military intelligence personnel, soldiers and warders, with a combined strength of at least 200 men, entered the prison, armed with batons and other weapons for beating prisoners. Even though the prisoners were coordinated in shouting slogans, they were in different parts of the prison. At that time as the doors had not been opened, they were all shouting from within their locked cells.

Warders then entered the cells and began scolding the prisoners, chaining their hands behind their backs and beating them. Some prisoners were dragged out of their cells. At that time there were three prisoners in each cell. After these prisoners had been dragged out, the warders came back and repeated the process. The second time they were more violent and one old man, who could not stand it any more, shouted at them with tears in his eyes: "You should not be brutal like this." But that old man was also beaten and taken out. His name was U Kyin Maung.

The prisoners who were taken out of the various solitary confinement cell blocks were all beaten by many prison officers in the field beside the prison office. They were beaten with various kinds of sticks and even iron bars. They were kicked with army boots and jumped on. The prison officers continued to beat the prisoners until the majority were unconscious. These unconscious prisoners were then thrown, as if they were corpses, into the cells on death row.

Prisoners who were badly tortured were: See Side Bar

The prison authorities continued to beat these prisoners who had chanted slogans in support of the hunger strike very brutally until the next morning. At the same time they took the hunger strikers out of the cells. The hunger strikers were very weak and were unable even to walk. The authorities led them into the death row cells and showed them the prisoners who had been badly tortured and were stained with blood, telling them these prisoners were suffering because of their hunger strike. The authorities told them that to prevent more suffering they should abandon their hunger strike. The prisoners were then taken back to the cells and ordered to eat.

When the hunger strikers still refused to eat, the prison authorities put cooked rice in front of them. Then they started to beat the strikers, even though by this stage they were so weak they were unable to walk. All hunger strikers were beaten in various brutal ways. Finally they sorrowfully began to eat.

Meanwhile, 40 of the strikers, including five of the hunger strikers, were again taken into the military dog cells. Early the next morning, they were sent to Tharawadi prison and Thayet prison in two groups, with orders for them to be denied medical attention.

The prisoners from death row were beaten the most severely. Finally some of them became unconscious and lost large amounts of blood, and were sent to the prison hospital. The hospital became full with victims. Those prisoners who were not so seriously injured were not sent back to their normal cells, but were kept on death row and provided with no medical treatment. 40 were sent to Tbamwadi and Tbayet prisons. 100 were kept on death row and tortured. The remaining strikers were kept in tiny cells in solitary confinement.

When they came to visit the following day, all of the family of the prisoners heard about the events that had taken place and about the death, bloodshed, brutal beatings and the departure of two trucks from the prison, carrying prisoners soaked with blood. When they heard this outside the gate of the prison, all the family members began crying loudly. But they were not allowed to meet the prisoners. Although they pleaded with prison officials to let them know if the prisoners were still alive or just injured, the officials never told them.

On their way home, the family members of the political prisoners were unable to control themselves and cried and talked about the situation with other passengers on the same bus. The other passengers also became sad and angry, but tried to calm down the grieving family members, since there was nothing that could be done about the situation.

8.2 The case of Soe Thein and Zaw Win Htut

Soe Thein had been sent to the attached prison from solitary-confinement cell block number 5 in the main prison, after being accused of discussing Politics. This happened one month prior to the 25 September 1990 prison strike. There are two walls between the main prison and the attached prison, so it is well isolated from main prison.

This move was not known, at the time, by the prisoners staying at attached prison, as the information was totally blacked out. Soe Thein and Zaw Win Htut were put together in a tiny cell in the attached prison.

When the prisoners in the main prison were taken out to be beaten, warders also arrived at the cell of Soe Thein and ordered him to move again. They took him out with hands shackled and face covered, and beating him when he got outside the cell.

How was Soe Thein related to the strike? He was not involved in what was happening in the main jail. He did not even hear about it. Why did they beat Soe Thein? Zaw Win Htut, who was left in the cell, shouted out: "You are totally unjust. Stop it, or if you are brave, come on let's fight one on one". Four warders opened the door, rushed into the cell and started to beat him very violently. He suffered a head fracture and was sent to the prison hospital.

The real reason the warders came and beat Soe Thein was probably not to do with the strike, but had more to do with their hatred of him. What is the principle of the jail manual? Is it justice or prejudice?

8.3 The demand for an end to hard labour

The following event took place at number 4 hall. There are two different types of cell block for political prisoners in Insein prison the solitary confinement cell blocks and the ordinary halls. Out of a total of five halls, three contain political prisoners. There are over 200 in each hall. Political prisoners who are put in solitary confinement cellblocks get only 15 minutes for washing clothes, bathing and walking, but do not need hard labour. In the halls the prisoners are a little more free, but they have to work in the vegetable gardens.

Political prisoners do not mind working in the vegetable garden, but they regard it as an insult to their dignity because it would put them same status as criminals. The work is extremely tiring, and prisoners are forced to work under a lot of pressure. The prison authorities use it as another way to intimidate and oppress prisoners. In line with the SLORC since, prison authorities always insult political prisoners, saying: "there are no political prisoners; all are criminals". One time students and became angry at these insults, and demanded that the prison authorities stop giving them forced labour.

The prison authorities summoned the students and told them they if they did not want to work in the vegetable gardens, they would not be allowed to stay in the halls, but would have to stay in solitary confinement. The students replied that they would not provide hard labour they agreed to stay in solitary confinement instead.

The prison authorities told the students who had agreed to be to solitary to come out. About 40 students came out of their hall brought their personal belongings (clothes, food, blankets) with them. Many warders accompanied them into

the solitary confinement cell blocks. However, they were not sent to the solitary confinement cell blocks, but were put into the dog cells instead. The dog cells are for the punishment for prisoners who commit crimes in prisons.

These students were very surprised that they were being taken into the dog cells. They were put into tiny cells, four people to a cell. When all the students were in the cells, the warders opened each cell in began to beat them, shouting 'This punishment is because you don't want to work. You worthless politicians! You f-ing politicians! This is you have to live! This is the dog cell!' The students had no opportunity to explain themselves. They did not even understand why they were being beaten, as they thought they had reached an agreement with the prison authorities. Thus, the dog cell was filled with the sound of beatings, shoutings and groans. All the students were given solitary confinement for one month as a punishment. Permission to receive visitors was denied and all their belongings were confiscated.

Please note: The dog cell was where the dogs used in patrolling the prison compound were kept. The prison authorities often used them to torture prisoners. Out of hatred, all the dogs were killed during a prison riot in 1988 and eaten by the prisoners.

8.4 The case of Zaw Myo Aung (Hall 4)

According to prison regulations, lights out is at 9 pm. After lights out, all prisoners must sleep and must remain silent. However, almost all the prisoners use this opportunity to talk with each other in whispers. The warders also come and talk with the prisoners.

Zaw Myo Aung was the general-secretary from Ma Ka Tha Pha (National Students' Organisation). Saya Maung Maung was a philosophy teacher from the workers' college. They were cell mates. One night they were talking together after 9 pm. It is common for prisoners to learn from teachers who have been incarcerated.

Zaw Myo Aung asked Saya Maung Maung a question relating to philosophy. Saya Maung Maung replied, but one prisoner, named Hla Htim, disagreed with what Saya Maung Maung was saying, and a quarrel started with Zaw Myo Aung. The next day Hla Htun kept quiet, pretending that nothing had happened, but the warder, Soe Win took the case to the prison authorities because he had heard about it from another prisoner.

The warder later summoned Hla Htun saying that the case would be sent to trial. Hla Htun refused and so was forced to attend the internal hearing and give evidence. Three senior prisoners were also summoned to give evidence against the accused, but no one was summoned as witness to defend

Zaw Myo Aung. Consequently he was found guilty and sentenced to three months' in solitary confinement in the dog cell, with hands and feet shackled. He was also refused permission to receive visitors.

He was found guilty of the following offenses:

1. Talking after 9 PM
2. Lack of respect for prison authorities.

If they wish to enforce the first of these, then all prisoners must be sentenced. The second punishment is because he allegedly said to Ma Htun that he 'was not afraid of telling a truth to any one even if he was a prison official', and the authorities were angry that he dared to talk in this way in prison.

On another occasion, Abbot Meggin was put into a tiny solitary confinement cell because he had taught English to students in hall 3.

8.5 The case of Kyaw Htway (Cell block 5)

After staying in prison for a long time, sometimes students become friendly with some of the warders, and they often tease each other.

One time, Kyaw Htway asked warder Nyunt Kyi jokingly, "Will you give me your sister's hand in marriage?" Such jokes and taunts are quite common. All the prisoners and warders in Cell block 5 understood the situation, and did not take offense in such cases. However, on this occasion Kyaw Htway was soon summoned to the prison office by the authorities. They moved him to the attached prison, accusing him of insulting a prison official. When a prisoner is moved to a new cell, he always finds it hard to adjust to new conditions that are likely to be alien to him.

The warder, Nyunt Kyi, had not made any complaint, but the authorities had come to hear about the incident and took action directly. When Kyaw Htway was summoned, Nyunt Kyi apologised and appealed to the authorities not to take any action. However, his appeal was rejected and the authorities threatened Nyunt Kyi, saying: "Do you want to lose your job and be punished?" Moreover, they forced Nyunt Kyi to act as a witness.

8.6 The case of Mya Aye and others

Mya Aye is the vice-chairman of a post-graduate student democratic union. In May 1990 he was tortured and sent to solitary confinement because he complained that the meat ration was much smaller than it have been.

In December 1990, prisoners from death-row cell block number 2 were taken out and badly beaten. All were blindfolded with sarongs and forced to walk past the

warders in single-file. The warders hit them side of the face as they walked past. When the other prisoners warders why they did that, they replied that it was a prison custom.

In June 1991, the students from Hall 3 complained to the prison authorities that they were only receiving half the usual amount of soap. Because of this complaint, fifteen students were moved to the attached prison.

8.7 Forced latrine cleaning

In November 1991, 100 political prisoners from Insein prison were moved to Thayet prison. All were kept together in Hall 2, separate from the criminal prisoners. There are four halls in Thayet prison.

One duty for prisoners is to clean the prison latrine pots (big bowls of excrement in the latrines.) This duty is a punishment for prisoners who commit a crime while in prison. Otherwise, it is a job for prisoners who want a reduction in their jail sentences. Only these two types of prisoners have to do this job.

As a part of the tradition in prisons, no political prisoners are required to clean the pots whatsoever. In Thayet prison, the political prisoners were always quiet, and did not create any problems. The criminals who had committed crimes in prisons were given the duty to do this job there.

However, two weeks after these prisoners were moved, the authorities announced that the political prisoners had to clean the latrines in their block. Since this was an unusual move, and not in accordance with prison regulations, the prisoners concerned asked the authorities the reason for this order. The reason given was that the political prisoners had been talking to the criminal prisoners when they came to clean the latrine.

This reason was a little strange. Speaking with criminals is not usually a problem. Indeed, for the two weeks preceding this incident, the political prisoners had been talking to criminal prisoners openly and in front of warders, with no problem. The political prisoners requested a discussion with the prison authorities over this incident. They did not complain about having to clean the latrines. They did not threaten to call a strike. They just wanted to have a discussion. But the prison authorities did not reply.

At 5 pm, while waiting for a reply from the prison authorities, the warders instructed the prisoners to collect their personal belongings together. At 6 pm the political prisoners were sent to three different halls. At Thayet prison, each hall has three large cells. Eleven political prisoners were put into each cell. These cells are large enough for 60-70 prisoners each. The rest of the prisoners in

these cells were criminal prisoners.

At 7 pm, all the halls were closed. At 7:30 a warder visited these three halls with a list of names. Nine prisoners on the list were taken out. The prisoners did not understand what the reason was. These nine prisoners were all students. Without any explanation, prison authorities put them into solitary confinement cell block number 2 and shackled their legs to a 2.6viss (about 4.2 kg) wooden weight.

Two days later, the Chief Warden of the prison called these prisoners to his office. He told them that they were punished because they insulted and opposed the prison authorities. Although they denied this and tried to tell him that they were just requesting to meet with him, they were immediately put back into their tiny cells without being allowed to explain what had happened. The nine were then put into tiny solitary confinement cells for one month.

Then two days after the punishment had been handed were put on trial. The nine students were:

1. Zaw Myo Win
2. Soe Myat
3. Aung Paing
4. Kyaw Wunna
5. Hla Win
6. Ye Maw Htoo
7. Kyaw Kyaw Thein
8. Hla Myo Naung
9. Win Naing Oo

8.8 The pen case (Thayet Prison)

The following incident took place at number 3 cell block, Thayet Prison in April 1992. There are four cell blocks in it.

Number 3 cell block was quiet after the 9 pm lights out. Some prisoners had fallen asleep and some had not. There were 10 prisoners in 8 cells in this block. It was a windy night. The rhythmic banging of a loose corrugated iron door was the only sound to be heard.

At one point when a powerful gust of wind blew against the door, something dropped onto the floor in front of number 6 cell where Win Naing Oo and Ye Maw Htoo were confined. Ye Maw Htoo was fast asleep. Win Naing Oo got up and found a folded Longyi (Sarong). It must have been left by someone to dry it out this evening, he thought. Then he shouted, "Whose is that?" A voice from number 3 cell answered, "That's mine." It was Soe Myat. "Grab it and throw it to me," he continued. "There is a ballpoint pen inside."

Win Naing Oo grabbed it and threw it to Soe Myat through iron railing. They used to throw food, cheroots, etc. from

one cell to another because cell doors were locked.

A corporal walked in before Soe Myat was able to snatch the bundle. He was not on duty at number 3 cell block; the warder on duty had gone out (of the building) for a while. The corporal picked up the bundle and unfolded it. He found a ballpoint pen inside. Soe Myat requested the corporal to give the Longyi and the ballpoint pen to him. But the corporal did not say anything and walked out of the building.

"Tell them the truth when they question you tomorrow," Soe Myat then said laughing. "There will be no problem. At worst they'll take away my visiting rights. Maybe, in addition, they'll give me a few lashes. I'll wear thick clothes tomorrow." Prisoners from other cells laughed too when they heard him say this. Some prisoners did not even know what had happened. Soe Myat was the only criminal in the number 3 cell block. He had been a notorious criminal and when he was in Insein Prison, he was loved and feared by fellow criminals. Many years of incarceration had made him an expert on prison laws and other unlawful dealings in the prison. He was also friendly with prison authorities.

Prisoners are forbidden to own pens. Sometimes action is taken in such cases, but sometimes is not. When the warders do not turn a blind eye to this kind of thing, they usually just ask the prisoner where he got the pen, and then revoke visiting rights for a month. This is usually the maximum punishment. Wm Naing Oo and Soe Myint thought that they would be punished like this.

The next morning, at 7 am, the chief warden, prison officials and 100 warders came into the solitary confinement cell-block shouting angrily and beating on the walls with sticks. The cells were locked.

They first opened the cell where Win Naing Oo was staying.

Both Win Naing Oo and his cellmate, Ye Maw Htoo, were pushed violently out of their cell. Ye Maw Htoo did not know what was going on; he had been fast asleep last night when the corporal had walked away with the bundle. They were ordered to sit down. Then the warders started to beat them with batons, shouting and abusing them verbally at the same time. They did not attempt to ask any questions. At least they should have been told why they were being beaten. Both ended up slumped on the ground because of the beating.

Then the warders made them to sit up again. This time one said, "How did you manage to get the ballpoint pen?" Win Naing told them the truth. But another warder shouted, "Liar", and then they were beaten again. Win Naing Oo slumped to

the floor again.

Meanwhile, Soe Myat shouted from his cell: "What Win Naing Oo said is true. The pen is mine! Don't be so ruthless like this." Then they took out Soe Myat from his cell and beat him. Abbot Meggin, who was in the same cell as Soe Myat, was also beaten at the same time as Soe Myat. The abbot did not respond to the beating and received it with great tolerance. Then Zaw Myo Win and Maung Maung Than, who were cells between the others, were also taken out. The authorities ask Myo Win if he knew anything about the pen, but he replied that he did not. Then the authorities started to beat both of them very badly shouting, "Why not?" Finally both of them dropped to the ground. Neither of them had actually known anything at all about the incident.

Maung Maung Than complained that he had heart disease. The people beating him just made a joke about this and continued the beating. After the beating, the authorities ordered the prisoners to sit in the standard position. However, because of the beatings they had sustained, they were unable to maintain their balance, and they could not even sit. At that time, the warders in front of them made them sit with their heads between their knees, they were beaten again. This time they all lost consciousness.

Subsequently, all the students inside that solitary confinement cell block were taken out and beaten unconscious. The other students had never even heard about the problem with the pen, and did not understand why they were being beaten. That day the whole cell block rang out with the sound of shouting, cursing, beating and cries of pain.

The next day, Win Naing Oo was taken outside and left on a brick block under the scorching sun for two hours, with his legs chained and fixed with 10 viss (about 16 kg) iron shackles. He was then forced to walk on the burning hot sand, which was as hot as charcoal. [According to the prison manual, the heaviest weight to be shackled to a prisoner is 2.6 viss.

Then Soe Myat was taken out. But he was not given the same treatment as Win Naing Oo. Instead they offered him a matted cane chair to sit down with them. Then they asked him politely about the ballpoint pen.

Soe Myat told them the truth saying that he had found it somewhere. Without any further questioning, the prison authorities closed the case. Soe Myat was sent back to his cell. Before he left, they said to him, "We treated you as a gentleman. Ask Win Naing Oo how we treated him." Subsequently, all prisoners at the number 3 cell block were

put into solitary confinement.

The next day Win Naing Oo got cyanosis and his body turned a blue colour. He suffered tightness of breath and had great difficulty in breathing. The authorities gave him no treatment or care of any kind, even though the warders had seen his conditions. At 12 pm, other prisoners heard murmuring sounds coming from his cell and asked him how he was. There was no reply, however. So the whole solitary confinement cell block shouted together loudly.

Only then the authorities arrived and gave the sick prisoner some treatment. After about a week he recovered.

The following day, all family members of the prisoners arrived at Thayet prison to visit them. The authorities denied them permission, saying that the prisoners were being punished for climbing a water tower and giving a political speech. The family members cried and went home.

A protest was made by some prisoners regarding this case. They sent a protest letter to government officials not directly related to the prison. Some military intelligence personnel came and investigated the matter, but their findings were that:

1. The authorities beat the prisoners in self-defence
2. No 10 viss leg weights were found in Thayet prison. There were only the normal 2.6 viss weights.

The authorities concerned and all prisoners at Thayet Prison knew that the report was a coverup. This is usual when there are investigations in Burmese prisons.

There are many other cases of political prisoners in Thayet prison being mistreated.

For example: Ko Pyeit and Ko Hla Htay were forced to crawl on sharp pointed stones after being accused of failing to maintain their standard sitting position. They had to crawl like this for about 500 yards. While crawling they were beaten with sticks by officials on both sides. Finally they were put into solitary confinement cells. Such actions are totally against prison regulations.

One time Zaw Win Htut dropped a cup while drinking and it was reported to the prison authorities by a warder. This warder was angry with that particular prisoner as he had refused to give the warder food provided by his family members while they were visiting him.

After being taken out of his cell, Zaw Win Htut was forced to crawl on sharp stones and was beaten like Ko Pyeit and Ko Hla Htay. He was also put into a tiny solitary confinement cell. Some warders said that the hard bamboo

stick which was used to beat him broke into two pieces, that is how brutally he was beaten.

The root of all such incidents is this: When there is a problem between political prisoners and the prison authorities, no attempt is made by the authorities to find a reasonable solution. There is no discussion. There is no justice and no reasonable punishment. The prison authorities decide everything with hatred or prejudice and all they want to do is oppress the political prisoners with the intention of breaking their spirit.

The cases discussed in the present report are only those that took place in Insein and Thayet prisons. There are many other cases of systematic abuse in other prisons in different areas of Burma. Moreover, there have been many more cases, even in Insein prison, which are not in this report, as the author did not have personal knowledge of them.

8.9 Deliberate separation of immediate families in prisons
Prisons have a deliberate policy of separating immediate family members while they are in prison. For instance when father and son, two brothers, mother and daughter or two sisters are put in prison, the authorities separate them. This is obviously a deliberate policy for the political prisoners. If two brothers are sent to the same prison, their families can visit them at the same time. If they are sent to different prisons, travel will be a big burden for the families for they have to visit both prisons in different cities. It is a tiresome and costly task for the families. This policy is aimed at aggravating the suffering immediate family members whose brothers, fathers or sisters are in prison.

The following are a few examples of political prisoners who had to live separately:

1. U Hla Shwe People's Progressive Party (father-Mandalay Prison)
2. Set Aung Naing Rangoon University Student Union (son-Thayet Prison)
3. Aung Din All Burma Federation of Student Unions (elder brother-Thayet prison)
4. Shwe Phone Luu All Burma Federation of Student Unions (younger brother-Thayawaddy)

Another deliberate policy to aggravate the already burdened families whose loved ones are under detention is the transferring of prisoners from one prison to another. Prisoners in Insein Prison whose families are in Rangoon will be sent to prisons such as Mandalay Prison, Myingyan Prison, Thayet Prison, Thayawaddy Prison, etc., which are located up-country. Their families can easily visit them in Rangoon on a regular basis, but it is not easy for them to visit their loved ones in Mandalay Prison. It is both a costly and a wearisome task. Some poor families are hit hard by

this policy. When they cannot go to visit the prisoners do not get the essential things that they need while they are in prison.

8.10 The instigation of problems between political prisoners and criminals

The water supply is not sufficient for bathing; people can just get wet but not clean. As a result, many kinds of skin disease spread among the prisoners. When the political prisoners complained to the authorities that the water supply was not enough, the authorities failed to increase the water flow through the pipe, but instead told the criminals to carry the water themselves from an outside tap, 300 yards from the prison. When the criminals became tired of carrying water, the prison authorities told them that it was because of the demands of the political prisoners that they had to do this. They became angry with the political prisoners.

When the political prisoners refused to do hard labour, the prison authorities ordered the criminals to provide more labour. When the criminals became angry because they had to do so much, the prison authorities told them that it was because of the refusal of political prisoners to do this work. The political prisoners finally decided to work as they did to have a problem with the criminal prisoners, and they did not want their actions to create more suffering for other prisoners.

Because prisoners have to bathe using food plates, they are only able to scoop up tiny amounts of water. For this reason political prisoners asked to be allowed to bathe using water cups. At this time, the prison authorities allowed it, and also told the political prisoners to bathe first, before the criminal prisoners. When the criminal prisoners came to bathe, the warders stopped the water supply, saying: "The water has run out because the political prisoners who bathed before you used too much water."

There are many ploys prison authorities employ to create problems among prisoners. It is a part of the divide-and-rule policy of the SLORC. In this way, criminals come to be angry with and hate the political prisoners. The creation of disunity reduces problems for the prison authorities, as criminal prisoners never protest or oppose the prison authorities when political prisoners are badly tortured or beaten. There are also more methods used to separate political prisoners and criminal prisoners. For example, the order that criminal prisoners cannot eat meals with political prisoners and cannot talk with political prisoners.

This divide-and-rule policy is very dangerous. Whenever there is a likelihood of a confrontation with the criminals, the political prisoners try to avoid it as criminals are inclined to resort to violence. Prison authorities always turn

a blind eye to confrontation of this kind.

The following is the example of this kind which took place at number 1 cell, Hall 3 during an inspection in January 1991.

All prisoners were sitting in rows for the inspection as it was closing time of the prison. There were over 100 prisoners in all. Among them were 30 political prisoners. One of them was Thein Tun Oo, a handsome 16-year-old 8th grade student. The hall leader and another criminal named Soe Myat were sitting comfortably separate from the others.

Soe Myat was feared by all criminals and political prisoners alike.

At that moment, Soe Myat told Thein Tun Oo to come and Thein Tun Oo refused. Soe Myat asked him again to sit beside him. Again he refused. Then Soe Myat stood up and called him names. Soe Myat was angry because Thein Tun Oo refused. Soe Myat then continued, "I don't give a shit about you politicians. What do you take me for? Do whatever you want if you don't like my calling you names. Complain about it to anybody. I don't give a shit." None of the students replied; in fact, no one dared to say anything.

It's common in prisons that hard-core criminals force or coax younger prisoners to have sex with them. So younger prisoners have to be very careful when dealing with them, and keep a distance whenever possible.

After the inspection, political prisoners had a discussion on how to tackle this problem. Should the prison officials be informed? They did not want a fellow prisoner to be in trouble because of this whether he be a political prisoner or a criminal. Besides, they did not want to have any problems with the criminals. Their lives could be at stake. At the same time, they did not wish to be insulted again. Eventually, they decided that they would seek advice from political prisoners in other cells the following day.

But they could not sleep that night, knowing the mentality of prisoners and wondering what might happen the next day. As they worried, the criminals also had a talk on this. "I hate these politicians, I want to kill them all," were the remarks of many criminals. At that time, there was a well-known student leader among the political prisoners. His name is Zaw Myo Aung. The criminals decided that they would target him and Thein Tun Oo. Criminals urged Soe Myat to give them the order to kill the two. After consideration, Soe Myat told them to wait until the following day.

The next day Zaw myo Aung and Thein Tun Oo discussed this with political prisoners from other cells. "Should we

inform the authorities?" Just then Soe Myat came over and said, "So you are discussing because you don't like me to call you names? You want a fight with me?" The students asked him to stop abusing them. But he continued, "I will kill all of you and be happy to live in solitary confinement. He then went out to assemble the criminals from number 3 hall. Criminals from other halls came and joined them. There were many of them. The cell leader from number 1 cell of hall 3 gave them pointed iron rods. During this time, none of the political prisoners knew anything about the plot.

The situation was heading towards a likely massacre. Political prisoners had no weapons at all, not even a needle to fight back the hard-core criminals. Then in the nick of time, an old prisoner who did not wish to see this happen risked his life and informed the prison officials, knowing that he would be definitely killed if the criminals found out who told this to the authorities.

Prison authorities did not want such carnage to take place as it put all of them in jeopardy. So they intervened at the last minute slaughter was averted.

Even if it had happened, the prison authorities must be held responsible, for they were the ones who created the problem by gradually inciting hatred in the minds of the criminals against the students; the political prisoners.

Political prisoners are usually defenseless in prisons against all possible dangers.

Next 

General Issues

By Win Naing Oo

9.1 Buddhist Monks

It is estimated that there are nearly 200 Buddhist monks in Insein prison alone. One venerable monk is U Thu Mingala, who won a Buddhist literature title Pitaka Thone Bon (he gained a distinction in all three parts of the Tripitaka, the Buddhist canon). Along with him in Prison, there are 8 other senior monks who also won distinctions in one of the three parts or the whole of the Tripitaka. All of these monks are highly venerated in their respective areas. In Burma, there are only five monks who have gained distinctions in all three parts of the Tripitaka. One of these monks passed away in 1994, leaving only four alive.

According to Buddhist Law, in Buddhist country, if a King has oppressed his own people too much, the Buddhist monks

can impose some punishment such as not going to the palace or anywhere else when invited by the king, not accepting things offered by the King and not giving the King Buddhist services. This is called Patta Nikujjana Kan in Pali. The main reason for using this Kan is that the King comes to realize how brutally he is oppressing his citizens. It is intended to make him change his habits. The monks in Insein prison participated in a Patta Nikujjana Kan against the Burmese government and were accused of being fake Buddhist monks and were arrested by the military regime. U Thu Mingala and eight other senior monks were sentenced to 8 years in prison and other monks were sentenced to five or ten years in prison.

The monks have asked to wear robes in prison, but the prison authorities took off their robes and now the monks only wear white prison uniforms. In addition, the monks are not referred to by their monk names, only ordinary names. When the prison authorities call them, they do not use the word U, which is a respectful prefix to a name. The monk Meggin Sayadaw is over 70 years old, but the warden calls him, "Hey, Shwe Tha Aye" in a very rude way.

However, all the monks are very patient, but they did not accept their forced and unlawful disrobing. They have been staying in prison in accordance with all the traditional principles of a Buddhist monk they do not eat dinner (Buddhist monks are not allowed to eat after noon) and early morning meals are not provided. This means that they can only eat one meal a day (lunch). No monks in prison are allowed to preach the Buddhist Dharma and the prisoners are also not allowed to Pay obeisance (with palms raised together on the forehead) to monks.

9.2 Prisoners still facing trial

According to the law, a person who is accused of a crime is innocent until proven guilty. Furthermore, no political prisoner can beat a fellow prisoner. If a prisoner has to be beaten up for the crime he commits in prison the officials have to give him this punishment.

Hall no. 1 and hall no. 2 are full of prisoners who are still facing trial, and they number nearly 3,000. According to the law, they should not be treated as criminals. But this is not the case in Insein prison. Every day, they are oppressed and given punishment without justification. They have to suffer beatings, money being extorted, clothes being seized, hard labor, and have to clean excrement in the latrines. There is no possible excuse for such treatment.

They are the ones whose rights are most violated. They always look frightened because of the regular beating and of their morale crushed. Although the prison law allows them the luxury of receiving prison clothes and blankets, they never receive them. If they have good clothes when they are

sent to prison, they will be taken away as well, and replaced with old ones. The majority of prisoners are always half naked and sleep without blankets at night. (See also 2.1)

9.3 Public torture

On one occasion, two prisoners quarrelled with each other. The punishment was this: they had to fight each other again continuously. If they refused to do so, they would be beaten by the warders. When they became tired, they had to do press-ups on a 2 foot step, then they were beaten with canes by the warders. However, they could not continue the press-ups in that position and finally, their whole bodies shaking, fell down on the floor. The warders kicked them with military boots because they fell down on the floor. The two prisoners had to do press-ups even though their backs were bloody; they were still beaten. At that time, some other prisoners were nearby, but they were sent away from the scene by warders. I was also near there and when I left that scene, an old warder followed me and asked: "Are you feeling sad about that?" I didn't reply. He continued that "This is a prison, cruelty and injustice are not strange; if you understand that you can calm yourself down." All I could do was just stare at that old warder.

The ideology of warders is that beating the prisoners violently is the best way to prevent quarreling among them. It may work, but it is not in accordance with either human dignity or human rights.

However, this policy of the authorities means that prisoners try never to quarrel among themselves openly, because they know they would be beaten.

There is however a lesson prisoners learn from their experiences while in prison, That is, "if you have a fight with a fellow prisoner, fight him until he is dead so that it will be worth it as you will be severely beaten by prison officials for getting into a fight in the first place." This fact has contributed to many deaths in Burmese prisons.

9.4 Conspiracies In Prisons

There were over 200 political prisoners in hall number 4. They were closer to each other and more united than prisoners in other halls. If a problem occurred between a prisoner and the officials and if they believed that he was right, they all stood together.

Prison officials did not like it because it prevented them from controlling the prisoners completely. They blamed this unity among hall no.4 prisoners on Win Naing Oo. So they decided to bring charges against him.

They started to investigate whether he had violated prison regulations, but he had not. When this failed, they planned to plot against him. This failed again. Finally, they

summoned Soe Myat, the most feared criminal in prison. They said to him, "Win Naing Oo lodged a complaint with us about your wrong doings in prison. If we have to take action against you, you are going to be in big trouble. We want you to know this. We don't want to bring any charges against you. We hope that you understand what we are saying. Finish him off." This is the usual method for prison officials to get rid of some one they dislike.

Soe Myat believed what the authorities had said and held a grudge against Win Naing Oo. So he planned to kill him. But the plan was difficult carry out due to some objections from criminals who liked Win Naing Oo. As the whole thing took longer than it should to be carried out authorities called him and said, "We'll be more frank this time. We'll give you the protection. We'll give you special rights."

The conspiracy was somehow leaked and made known to political prisoners. They then began a whispering campaign among the prisoners that prison authorities would be held responsible if something happened to Win Naing Oo, that when it happened, they would not and that they would start a prison riot not only in hall no. 4, but would make it spread throughout whole prison. In fact, the prisoners did not know what the conspiracy was in detail, but as a precaution, they launched the campaign.

Since the campaign was launched, all prisoners had to be extra careful. They also had to organize some criminals. But by the time the news was spread throughout the whole prison, the prison authorities asked Soe Myat to stop it for a while, for fear that their plot be revealed. During this time, an order to transfer 100 prisoners to Thayet prison was issued and Win Naing Oo was listed among those who had to be transferred. That put an end to the conspiracy.

(Details were revealed only when both Win Naing Oo and Soe Myat were put in the same cell block in Thayet Prison and became friends.)

This is one of many common methods used by officials in prisons. Many have already died as a result of these practices. It is an open secret within the prison, but remains unknown to outsiders only because prisoners have no power to inform them.

It is generally understood by prison officials that locking away two criminals who dislike each other in the same cell gives then an opportunity to try to kill each other. This was the very method that gave a well-known hardcore criminal named Nga Shint a chance to crush the skull of another equally notorious criminal known as Mya Khaung with a blunt hoe. The whole prison knew that they had made a deal to behead other. This was also known to prison officials. Despite this, the two were deliberately locked in the same

cell.

It is customary in prisons that a prisoner who knows something of the corruption of the officials who has potential to upset their interests killed in some way or another.

Conclusion

By Win Naing Oo

On behalf of the political prisoners in Burma, I would like to make it clear that all we sought was freedom, justice and personal security fundamental rights enjoyed by any civilised society. What we were given were imprisonment, torture and even death.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its preamble declares "Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspirations of the common people, whereas it is essential, if a man is not compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law." Then we are the ones who genuinely seek peace whereas the SLORC denies the aspirations and desires of the people who cherish peace.

Even during the British era, cases in which prison authorities would deny water to political prisoners on hunger strike were never heard of. Yet during the BSPP and SLORC period water pots have been broken into pieces or seized, and the weak hunger strikers beaten again and again. We have heard this many times and now I have seen it with my own eyes. In some cases, prisoners have had to drink their own urine because, during the hunger strikes, the prison authorities seized the water pots.

Political prisoners during the period of British rule were permitted to read, write and discuss politics. It was the same in the period of the AFPFL government. Political prisoners were separated from the criminals and were able to get basic necessities. A person who was imprisoned in that period said to me in comparison of the two prison systems. "Our time in prison was like on going on a picnic compared with the situation now".

This kind of brutal treatment is imposed when all we have done is peacefully demonstrate. The world that we live in is becoming smaller and smaller day by day. The interrelation and interdependence among people the world over is now

greater than ever before. In this modern era a civilised man is one who considers not only his safety and security but also for other people.

We believe man has an unwritten duty to protect and to promote peace, culture and the intellectual advancement of all mankind. Is it not an insult to man's conscience and intelligence when in one corner of the world a handful of people are arbitrarily committing atrocities against millions of innocent people? Is it also not a challenge to peace and culture of mankind?

We want the whole world to know that we the Burmese people are experiencing unspeakable suffering under the military regime in this corner of the world.

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