

# **Asian Voices: Myanmar's Threat to Regional Security**



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## **FOREWORD**

**by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President**

**Myanmar is no longer merely an embarrassment that continues to undermine regional cohesion, it is a threat to our security.**

When Myanmar was invited to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997, there was an expectation that membership would provide an impetus for political and economic reforms as Myanmar integrated itself into an increasingly dynamic and democratic ASEAN community. This expectation was based on the assurances and statements made by Myanmar's military leaders and the belief that political advances were inevitable as Myanmar became an active partner in our regional community. At the time, we were assured by allies of the regime that political evolution in Myanmar would progress along the same path as the rest of ASEAN. We were grievously misled.

Convinced that any dialogue with Myanmar's military rulers is better than no dialogue, ASEAN has earnestly attempted to bring about political reform in Myanmar through a policy of "constructive engagement". But dialogue is a meaningful tool only when it produces positive results. Unfortunately "constructive engagement" has served as an alibi for unconditional and unprincipled engagement. Even though the ASEAN's attempts to encourage Myanmar to change have been largely sincere, the policy of constructive engagement has failed.

Since 1997, the situation in Myanmar has worsened to the extent whereby ASEAN and the world can no longer ignore the impact it is having on the region. The deterioration of Myanmar's economic and political stability continues to cast a shadow on ASEAN and has adversely affected ASEAN's legitimacy as a political grouping.

In 2004, I and other likeminded parliamentarians in ASEAN came to the conclusion that we could no longer ignore the terrible conditions in Myanmar and its impacts on the region. This realization spurred us to take the unprecedented step of crossing national and party boundaries across the region to form the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) in November 2004. The AIPMC is now composed of national caucuses of legislators in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, along with members of the Cambodian parliament.

Together, we have worked to advocate for human rights and democratic reform in Myanmar. We have helped ASEAN re-evaluate its policy of "constructive engagement" with Myanmar and contributed to a serious reassessment of ASEAN's longstanding principle of "non-interference".



The AIPMC played a critical role in ensuring that Myanmar withdrew from the ASEAN Chairmanship which was scheduled to commence in July this year. In the wake of this success, the AIPMC maintained the momentum of advocacy and pressure that contributed to the appointment of an ASEAN Special Envoy in December of 2005. Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, the ASEAN Special Envoy and Malaysia's Foreign Minister, was mandated to visit Myanmar to evaluate the military regime's progress in implementing democratic reform.

ASEAN has taken 9 years to change its approach to Myanmar. Unfortunately, without the international muscle of the UN Security Council, ASEAN's shift in perspective and tactics has had limited results.

Last year, I wrote an article in the Asian Wall Street Journal that identified Myanmar's regime as a threat to regional security. Months later, the same analysis was echoed in a report commissioned by Nobel Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu and former Czech President Vaclav Havel. They have asserted, just as we have, that the misrule in Myanmar poses a security threat. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled Myanmar as refugees and illegal migrant workers. Ignorance and bad governance have contributed to the thriving drug trade and conditions that will allow threats to public health such as HIV/AIDS, bird flu and SARS to spread unchecked.

Regional stability will always be threatened by the spill-over effects of Myanmar's misrule – whether it is a consequence of human rights violations, economic mismanagement, or sheer incompetence. It is clear that our destinies as neighboring countries are inextricably linked. Therefore, we need to seriously address Myanmar's deteriorating crises without delay.

Myanmar is no longer merely an embarrassment that continues to undermine regional cohesion, it is a threat to our security. This is why the AIPMC has consistently and determinedly called for the UN Security Council to act officially on Burma.

The Myanmar military has deployed empty promises and token gestures to buy time in the face of international pressure. Going along with this cynical game will lead to catastrophic results that will be suffered not just by the people of Myanmar, but also the people of Asia. It is time that the UN Security Council, as the ultimate body to ensure international peace and security, acts resolutely to ensure a peaceful, political solution in Myanmar.

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## **MYANMAR'S THREAT TO REGIONAL SECURITY**

**by Kraisak Choonhavan, Thai Senator, Chairman of the Thai Senate Foreign Affairs Committee & AIPMC Vice President**

...it is ironic that ASEAN governments, fully aware of the escalating multifaceted crisis in Myanmar, are nervous to acknowledge its ongoing and potential impacts on regional security.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has publicly committed itself to the principles of comprehensive security that acknowledge the fundamental linkages between good governance with traditional and non-traditional models of security. It is time that ASEAN leaders fulfill that commitment and acts to address the threat that the military regime in Myanmar poses to us all.

Through the Bali Concord II at the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in 2003, ASEAN member states were dedicated to the establishment of an ASEAN Community upon 3 pillars, including the ASEAN Security Community. The resulting Plan of Action encompasses various programs aimed at strengthening the elements of good governance as well as measures to prevent conflict and the escalation of conflict.

In addition to recognizing the rule of law, public participation, human rights, the free flow of information and the protection of vulnerable groups as essential to regional stability and security, the ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action also addresses various non-traditional trans-boundary security threats such as transnational crime, trafficking in persons, drugs and precursors, as well as communicable diseases.

Hence, it is ironic that ASEAN governments, fully aware of the escalating multifaceted crisis in Myanmar, are nervous to acknowledge its ongoing and potential impacts on regional security.

This is in stark contrast to the work of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), which has been driven by serious concerns over the impacts of Myanmar's misgovernance on regional politics, economics and security, along with our commitment to the principles of human rights and democracy. Many of these concerns were reflected at the UN Security Council's informal briefing on Myanmar in December 2005 and its follow-up briefing in May 2006.

Unfortunately, informal talks about the spill-over effects of Myanmar's problems are far from sufficient. In the past year, the military regime of Myanmar led by Senior General Than Shwe, has increasingly shown its contempt for ASEAN and its regional partners. Only recent moves to take Myanmar to the UN Security Council have sparked any positive reaction at all from the Senior General's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). This is proof the UN Security Council represents our "final frontier" in ensuring that genuine political and economic reforms take place in Myanmar that will, in turn, improve regional security.



Myanmar is a situation that merits the UN Security Council's attention and action on many grounds. The gravity of the situation is reflected by the following matters that continue to directly and indirectly affect regional and international security.

### **Failure by Myanmar to Implement Democratic Reform**

When Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997, the Myanmar authorities assured us that it was engaged in a "step-by-step" process to implement political and economic reforms to achieve democracy. The "steps" taken by the regime have been regressive. Serious human rights violations have escalated as the regime pursues a program to overturn and suppress the results of the 1990 general elections, which were overwhelmingly won by the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The international reaction over the Depayin Massacre of May 2003 spurred the regime to dust off a mothballed National Convention to draft a new constitution as part of a roadmap to democratize Myanmar. The roadmap has been widely dismissed as illegitimate and a sham, with UN Special Rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro describing participation in the oppressive National Convention as "virtual house arrest".

The regime's roadmap is a dismal failure and only operates as a showcase that helps it to stave off international pressure whilst it increases and intensifies attacks on political parties and the pro-democracy movement. The resulting climate of impunity has included such deplorable incidents as the March 2006 lynching of former political prisoner Thet Naing Oo in Rangoon.

It is only right that the National League for Democracy (NLD) has refused to engage in the National Convention and any other "roadmap" initiatives of the regime until the commencement of political dialogue. The bitter lessons learnt by the NLD and ethnic political parties from their prior participation in such processes prove that engagement would be futile without prior political dialogue based on the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights.

UN efforts to bring about democratic reforms through former Special Envoy Razali Ismail and Special Rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro fell flat when both were barred from Myanmar in 2003. The regime only allowed the May 2006 visit of Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari to defuse possible UN Security Council action. SPDC power-brokers calculated that Gambari's meetings with both Senior General Than Shwe and detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi would temporarily satisfy the Security Council and extended the Nobel Laureate's detention for another year shortly after he left.

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The SPDC's handling of the Gambari visit and ASEAN diplomatic efforts proves that the regime will continue to deliver nothing but token measures if it is not subjected to firm and persistent pressure. Unless the international community takes a firm and resolute position via the UN Security Council, it is highly unlikely that the SPDC will stop exploiting its range of tactics to maintain and consolidate power through direct means and proxies such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

### **Ethnic Conflict**

Myanmar's military has continued its campaign of terror against the country's ethnic nationality groups. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium estimates there are 540,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Eastern Myanmar alone. In Western Myanmar, the SPDC has targeted ethnic Muslim Rohingyas. As this article goes to print, a renewed military operation against the Karen ethnic group in Eastern Myanmar has resulted in 18,000 more internally displaced persons.

Ethnic tensions have been further exacerbated by the unrelenting denial and suppression of political rights. In 2005, numerous ethnic leaders were arrested from the Shan, Rohingya and Mon communities, including MPs-elect. Many of them were sentenced to lengthy jail terms, with Shan State Peace Council Chairman (SSPC) Gen Hso Ten sentenced to 106 years. Rohingya MP-elect U Kyaw Min was sentenced to 47-years in prison while his wife and children each received 17-year prison terms.

### **Refugees**

Myanmar's military war on ethnic nationality communities has caused refugees to flee to neighboring countries to escape severe violence and persecution. UN statistics conservatively estimate that there are 688,500 Myanmar refugees in Thailand, Bangladesh, India and Malaysia.

Here in Thailand, we are witnessing a situation where there are two generations of young people whose total life experience only involves the confines of their refugee camps – a social tragedy of enormous and unparalleled magnitude.

### **Human Rights Violations**

Myanmar's military regime is guilty of perpetrating egregious human rights violations. Currently, there are over 1,100 political prisoners incarcerated in Myanmar's jails. The prisoners are routinely tortured and some are confined in cells that were originally built as dog kennels.



Myanmar's most notable political prisoner is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been detained without charges or trial for more than 10 of the last 17 years. Other documented human rights abuses include:

- Extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances, arbitrary detention;
- Land confiscation and forced relocation for SPDC infrastructure projects – the current large-scale move of the capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana (now renamed “Naypyidaw” or “Royal Capital”) that forced the relocation of over 2,000 villagers is merely the most infamous;
- Forcing civilians to serve as military porters, to act as human mine sweepers, and to work on infrastructure projects, e.g. the construction of roads, dams, railroads, and military barracks with little or no pay;
- The forced conscription of an estimated 70,000 children to serve in the regime's military, a figure that exceeds that of any other country in the world; and
- The systematic use of rape as a weapon of war by the SPDC military and the sexual abuse of women and girls from communities suspected of supporting armed opposition groups.

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### **Illicit Drugs, HIV/AIDS and Other Public Health Issues**

It is a well-known fact that Myanmar is the world's number 2 producer of opium and heroin. A lesser-known fact is that Myanmar is one of the world's top two producers of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS). The widespread social and health impacts associated with amphetamine use and addiction has largely been ignored by ASEAN. In terms of human and state security, amphetamine abuse in Southeast Asia is a potential time bomb, with increasing numbers of adolescents and young people using this relatively cheap drug.

The production of heroin in Myanmar and its link to the spread of HIV/AIDS in neighboring countries, especially India and China, is well documented. By studying the genetic make-up of various strains of HIV, it has been possible to trace the origins of HIV strains directly to Myanmar. The rising incidence of HIV/AIDS in the areas of India and China bordering Myanmar has paralleled the increasing volume of heroin and amphetamine trafficked from Myanmar. I was personally shocked by a news report in April 2005 in which an Indian military leader declared that more Indian soldiers were killed by HIV/AIDS than militant bullets in Northeast India.



It is clear that the SPDC has contributed directly and indirectly to conditions that have allowed drug production and trafficking to thrive. Such misgovernance continues to pose a serious threat to the Asian region and undermines any national and regional initiatives to curb the drug menace.

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Other health issues affecting the countries bordering Myanmar include the increased incidences of TB, drug resistant malaria, and filariasis. Thailand had previously eliminated these diseases but now faces new outbreaks through disease-porous borders. In the context of ASEAN, which is working to grapple with the implications of avian flu and SARS, the SPDC's ignorance and lack of concern continues to be a stumbling block.

In March 2006, the Center for Public Health and Human Rights Department of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health issued a report that exposed the ongoing public health crisis facing Myanmar's people and the implications these problems have for the region. The report shows how the SPDC's policies that restrict public health and humanitarian aid have created an environment where AIDS, drug-resistant tuberculosis, malaria and avian flu (H5N1) are spreading unchecked, and new disease strains are being incubated.

The report highlights the military authorities' severe lack of commitment to health and education, calling the SPDC's budgets for its National AIDS Control Program (US\$22,000), filariasis disease control (US\$6,000 despite two million cases reported to the WHO per year) and tuberculosis control (US\$312,000) "among the lowest levels of government investment in health worldwide". This is yet another example of the twisted priorities of the SPDC that prioritises military expansion, arms acquisition and prestige projects above basic needs.

### **Causing and Abusing A Humanitarian Crisis**

The SPDC has been the root cause of the current humanitarian crisis facing Myanmar's people. The regime is one of the key contributors to Myanmar's humanitarian crisis through military operations against ethnic civilians, general neglect of the national population and serious economic mismanagement. The capricious move of Myanmar's capital to a military stronghold has further bankrupted the population, making tens of thousands more vulnerable to human trafficking, economic exploitation and poverty-related disease.



The regime has sought to manipulate and co-opt aid for its own oppressive agendas. The August 2005 withdrawal of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was the direct result of the SPDC's interference in efforts to deliver aid to those who needed it. Three months later, MSF-France decided to withdraw from Myanmar because of the same reasons cited by Global Fund.

In December 2005, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) suspended all prison inspection activities in Burma because of the insistence by the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) that its officials accompany ICRC inspectors. The USDA is the SPDC's political arm and the ICRC could not agree to such demands without violating their own protocols on independent verification of prison conditions through interviews with prison inmates and political prisoners. The ICRC is still attempting to resume prison inspections but their efforts to engage the SPDC on this issue have so far been futile.

To further complicate matters, in February 2006, the SPDC issued new guidelines for UN agencies, INGOs and other international organizations operating in Myanmar. The new guidelines represent a formalization of the processes and restrictions that caused Global Fund and MSF-France to withdraw their operations. The guidelines officially endorse SPDC and USDA interference in most key aspects of work done by humanitarian aid organizations.

The inability of aid agencies to operate in Myanmar, coupled with the miniscule amount of money that the SPDC spends on public health issues, is a recipe for disaster that poses a serious threat to the region. Given this dismal scenario, Myanmar could very well become the epicenter for the avian flu pandemic. Even if one were to dismiss the possibility for the spread of avian flu, the known problems involving HIV/AIDS, TB, and drug-resistant malaria pose serious and significant public health issues for all of us.

### **A Millstone Around ASEAN's Neck**

ASEAN has had to expend considerable amounts of political capital in defending our recalcitrant neighbor. ASEAN's potential diplomatic, political and economic influence has become a hostage to the Myanmar's regime's misrule and misbehavior.

One recent example involves the international controversy surrounding Myanmar becoming the ASEAN Chair that dragged on for months before Myanmar relinquished their claim in July 2005.

The inability of aid agencies to operate in Myanmar, coupled with the miniscule amount of money that the SPDC spends on public health issues, is a recipe for disaster that poses a serious threat to the region.



One does not have to be a rocket scientist to realize that the myriad problems caused by the Myanmar regime include serious threats to regional security and stability.

Other recent cases include the ASEM May 2005 meeting in Kyoto where Myanmar's human rights violations hijacked the agenda, the ASEAN boycott of the September 2005 EU Economic Ministers meeting in Rotterdam, and the May 2006 EU announcement that Myanmar's membership in ASEAN was a serious impediment to future free trade agreement discussions. Myanmar has become a millstone around our collective necks.

Myanmar's military rulers clearly indicated their disdain for ASEAN when it first agreed to a visit by ASEAN envoy, Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar in December 2005 and then delayed setting a date for several months. When Syed Hamid Albar was finally allowed to visit in late March, the SPDC frustrated his fact-finding mission by barring meetings with Aung Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders. This forced Syed Hamid Albar to cut short his visit. Shortly thereafter, Myanmar failed to send a representative to the ASEAN Defense Ministers meeting in May 2006.

One does not have to be a rocket scientist to realize that the myriad problems caused by the Myanmar regime include serious threats to regional security and stability. I believe our ASEAN leaders are well aware of these facts but are afraid that taking a public stand may provoke a worse reaction from the regime, causing more problems for "frontline" states sharing borders with Myanmar. This shortsighted approach is helping to prolong and worsen the problem. Just as the Myanmar regime has failed to deliver on long-standing promises of reforms, ASEAN's dithering is flouting commitments made through the ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action.

In absence of political will in ASEAN, I and my other colleagues in the AIPMC believe that the most effective approach to restoring democracy in Burma is through action by the UN Security Council. We are not calling for military intervention but we do believe that a formal resolution with enforceable measures, followed by firm and leveraged diplomacy will deliver the results that the people of Myanmar and this region so urgently need.

*A shortened version of this article was published on 19 June, 2006, in The Jakarta Post.*



## FOREWORD~ POISONED FLOWERS

by Teresa Kok, Malaysian MP & AIPMC Secretary, and  
Loretta Ann P Rosales, Philippine Congresswoman & AIPMC  
Committee Member

We commend the Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) for publishing this report. It comprehensively shows the effects that Burma's drug problem has on the local population. The interviews conducted with Palaung women, the wives or mothers of drug addicts, show lives torn apart and futures denied by the use of drugs in Burma.

Local Palaung villagers have seen fields once used for tea be replaced by opium so that greater profits can be made. Villagers desperate to earn a living turn to working in opium fields for better wages. Alarming, wages are commonly paid in opium. The increased cultivation of opium has meant an increase in addiction and an increase in suffering among women and children.

Many women already live in dire poverty. Further hardship is caused by the addictions of their spouses and sons. Women are forced to single-handedly support their families, at the cost of their health and the education of their children. The increased financial difficulties and the resulting tension frequently lead to domestic violence. These women are further burdened by cultural taboos that trap them in a vicious cycle of affliction.

The drug problem, and its impacts on women and children, is not only restricted to Palaung areas. Burma's failure to eradicate drugs has brought untold suffering to its people. Despite claims to the contrary, the drug problem in Burma is worsening and has become a threat to stability and peace in the region. The need for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to take immediate and appropriate action to address this is apparent.

The PWO, through this report, have succeeded in creating an avenue for women's voices to be heard and thus fuel the efforts of the international community to help deal with the drug problem in Burma.

We hope that the courage of these women in sharing their stories empowers all efforts to effectively curb the production of drugs. Their strength and desire should serve as encouragement for us to help to ease the suffering in Burma faced particularly by women and children.

Burma's failure to eradicate drugs has brought untold suffering to its people. Despite claims to the contrary, the drug problem in Burma is worsening and has become a threat to stability and peace in the region. The need for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to take immediate and appropriate action to address this is apparent.

*This foreword was published in the June 2006 report "Poisoned Flowers: the impact of spiraling drug addiction on Palaung Women in Burma", available at [www.womenofburma.org](http://www.womenofburma.org)*



## **FOREWORD ~ THE WHITE SHIRTS**

**by Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Indonesian MP and AIPMC Vice President**

The SPDC depends on the USDA as a civilian force to bully and oppress other civilians. Members of the USDA have been linked to the attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in November 1996 and, more recently, to the brutal Depayin Massacre in May 2003. The latter was a failed attempt to assassinate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and destroy the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The political ascendancy of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the blatant efforts of Burma's military regime to portray it as a legitimate and democratic force are matters for grave concern.

The USDA, formed in 1993 and recognized as the "political arm" of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, is notorious for its often-violent intimidation of pro-democracy groups in Burma.

The SPDC depends on the USDA as a civilian force to bully and oppress other civilians. Members of the USDA have been linked to the attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in November 1996 and, more recently, to the brutal Depayin Massacre in May 2003. The latter was a failed attempt to assassinate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and destroy the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The USDA, disguised as a government-operated NGO, relies on extortion, coercion, and intimidation as a means of raising funds for its "benevolent" activities. This report documents the role of the USDA as an organization designed to infiltrate and co-opt every aspect of civil society in Burma. The USDA has worked to pervert international humanitarian efforts into public relations and foreign exchange fundraising opportunities for the SPDC.

During the last year, Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and Medicins Sans Frontieres (France) ceased their activities in Burma because of undue interference in their work. In December, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had to suspend its inspections of prisons in Burma because of the USDA's insistence on accompanying ICRC representatives. The interference in the ICRC prison inspections was clearly an attempt to conceal the plight of over 1,000 detained political prisoners who are routinely tortured, denied adequate medical treatment and who die in prison as a result.

The USDA forcibly recruits its members in a climate of fear and retribution. As the "political arm" of the military regime, it has been actively engaged in forcing people to attend political rallies intended to give credence to the regime-orchestrated National Convention. The involvement of the USDA in the political rallies represents the beginning stage for the transformation of the USDA into a political party.



It is apparent from recent developments that the USDA's makeover into a "legitimate" political party is meant to ensure that the SPDC retains its control of a pseudo-democratic government with SPDC head Senior General Than Shwe as "President for Life."

Despite the climate of fear perpetuated by the Burmese military regime and the USDA, it is a constant source of inspiration to me that pro-democracy activists and ordinary people alike remain committed and dedicated to freedom in Burma. My sister, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remains a constant global beacon of graceful resistance, refusing to respond to violence or hatred in kind, even under the greatest of pressures.

Adding urgency to the need for a genuine transition to democracy in Burma is the thousands of new internally displaced Karen villagers, under attack from the SPDC Army. We MUST NOT ignore our obligation to act decisively on Burma.

As my colleagues and I from the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) have advocated in the past, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must take action in the case of Burma. The UN Secretary-General must be empowered in his efforts to facilitate national reconciliation and democratization in Burma. This also includes steps to ensure that the USDA does not compromise Burma's transition to a civilian government.

**Adding urgency to the need for a genuine transition to democracy in Burma is the thousands of new internally displaced Karen villagers, under attack from the SPDC Army. We MUST NOT ignore our obligation to act decisively on Burma.**

*This foreword was published in the May 2006 report "The White Shirts: How the USDA will become the new face of Burma's Dictatorship", available at [www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/USDA\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/USDA_Final_Report.pdf)*



## **ASEAN CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE NERVE ON MYANMAR**

**by Philippines Congressman Mario “Mayong” Joyo Aguja and AIPMC Member**

Gen. Maung Aye had arrived in Russia bearing “an extensive list of Russian arms and military hardware” to acquire. Such extravagance is outrageous when most of Myanmar’s people suffer extreme impoverishment. It’s also a hint that the generals feel far from secure.

Manila: ASEAN’s Special Envoy to Myanmar Syed Hamid Albar will be briefing his counterparts this week at a retreat in Ubud on his recent visit to Yangon.

However, the Malaysian Foreign Minister’s report is not likely to provide any new information or good news that somehow, the Myanmar military authorities have miraculously fulfilled their promises to ASEAN concerning economic and political reforms.

Already, the statements emanating from ASEAN capitals after Syed Hamid’s premature departure from Yangon on March 24 indicate that ASEAN leaders may be considering backing off from the bold advocacy they initiated last year, which induced Myanmar to withdraw from the ASEAN chair. ASEAN ministers are giving the impression that they may be losing their resolve, perhaps even their nerve, when it comes to negotiating with the reigning generals.

History is written by the decisive, not the jittery. ASEAN leaders must be able to see that the stone facade set up by the Myanmar regime is a thin and teetering one.

The sudden move of Myanmar’s capital to a semi-completed bunker last November, in which civil servants were given 48 hours’ notice, does not signal strength. The regime’s dwindling grip on the economy, even as it exposes its inability to understand the bird flu epidemic has further eroded business confidence to the point of despair.

Even the annual military parade to mark Armed Forces Day on March 27 was conducted in front of an audience of military men and their families, under tight security, away from the direct gaze of the general public. Despite the increased distance from democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s home, where she remains under house arrest, the authorities continue to isolate her for fear of her national and international influence.

On April 4, the news service Kommersant reported that Gen. Maung Aye had arrived in Russia bearing “an extensive list of Russian arms and military hardware” to acquire. Such extravagance is outrageous when most of Myanmar’s people suffer extreme impoverishment. It’s also a hint that the generals feel far from secure.



This is why ASEAN cannot afford to shy away from taking leadership in solving the Myanmar question. The current crisis is partly a result of the ASEAN's prior dithering over Myanmar, which saw ASEAN becoming Myanmar's greatest defender even as the regime flouted its most basic values. If ASEAN fails to garner sufficient political will to solve this problem, it will undermine its role as the guardian of regional security. How then will it be able to maintain its credibility in the region, let alone internationally?

The Myanmar authorities have so far modified their behavior and rhetoric in response to those who willing to exercise leverage and determination, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United States government. It had, until last year, treated ASEAN with contempt.

Now, the Myanmar generals would have us believe they are totally in control. They would prefer ASEAN to cease its advocacy and revert to the thankless job of defending the indefensible. They want ASEAN to campaign against pressure without delivering any tangible benefits. Such extreme and selfish demands are an insult to the spirit of ASEAN solidarity.

We must see beyond their bluff. Regional players, such as India and China, now realize that it is not in their economic or security interests to allow Myanmar's instability to deteriorate further. ASEAN could lead a regional strategy to ensure that pro-reform forces, inside and outside, of Myanmar are able to deliver outcomes that will benefit the peoples of this region.

If isolation of Myanmar is not the solution for democratic reform, surely meaningful reform cannot be initiated when the Myanmar regime acts in remoteness. That is why ASEAN has to assert for an inclusive political process where the NLD, along with other pro-democracy parties that won the 1990 elections and ethnic nationality leaders be an integral part in the long-term solution for Myanmar.

ASEAN is capable of skillfully harnessing both diplomacy and pressure in a mutually reinforcing manner. Such an approach will lead to a practical and sustainable solution that is all-inclusive. If it shrinks away from this challenge, ASEAN risks delivering our regional destiny into the hands of irrational dictators.

Now, more than ever, an ASEAN strategy of principled engagement backed by international pressure is needed. If ASEAN is indecisive, it will not only be Myanmar's 50 million people who suffer.

Regional players, such as India and China, now realize that it is not in their economic or security interests to allow Myanmar's instability to deteriorate further.

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## **DEVASTATION AND MISERY IN BURMA**

**by Son Chhay, Cambodian MP and AIPMC Committee Member**

Coming from Cambodia, which is still recovering from the human devastation caused by the genocide during the Pol Pot regime, I was deeply saddened to learn from the refugees that among the many tragic similarities between our nations is the use of children as soldiers.

PHNOM PENH, Apr (IPS) - A recent visit by ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) parliamentarians to a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border provided a searing glimpse of a country devastated by violence and repression.

Military offensives, forced labour, forced relocation, extra-judicial killing, and torture by Burma's military government have driven many hundreds of thousands of Burmese into neighbouring countries as well as into the myriad refugee camps that line the country's borders. As many as 700,000 Burmese may have escaped to and now be living in Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and India. Burma is also known as Myanmar.

Forced labour and forced relocation have been perpetrated to allow military control over economic activity. Land has been cleared of civilians for commercial plantations and natural resource extraction such as logging and gas pipelines, for which the displaced people are then used as forced labour.

Systematic sexual violence by military personnel targeting ethnic nationality women is rife and has been widely documented by the UN Commission on Human Rights as well as by women's groups.

The ASEAN parliamentarians who visited the refugee camp were, like myself, deeply concerned about the situation in Burma. The current level of violence followed the rise of the hardliners after the purge of former PM general Khin Nyunt in late 2004. Since then the regime has been threatening to crush, once and for all, all opposition groups, implying that even groups that have declared ceasefires are not safe and should surrender or else. This threat appears to have intensified after the regime abruptly moved the capital to the jungle fortress of Pyinmana in November 2005.

Like many camps along the border, this one, which I will not name for obvious security and political reasons, houses over 20,000 refugees, including children, women, and men. War and military oppression have a devastating effect on people's lives, leaving victims anxious, depressed, and desolate. They develop a feeling of hopelessness about their inability to change their situation and redirect their future. This is particularly true when refugees have lived in camps their whole lives.

Aware that there were MPs from the ASEAN region visiting their temporary homes, the refugees, who were from various ethnic



communities, used this opportunity to remind me and my fellow politicians why our mission was so urgent and necessary.

They said that needed our voice to speak on their behalf because their own voices had been violently silenced and oppressed living in a camp. They wanted us to tell the world that they want their freedom and justice. They demanded more than rhetoric; the world must through its actions and by genuinely committing itself to do all in its power to ensure democratic reforms are brought to Burma.

Coming from Cambodia, which is still recovering from the human devastation caused by the genocide during the Pol Pot regime, I was deeply saddened to learn from the refugees that among the many tragic similarities between our nations is the use of children as soldiers.

In Burma, children as young as eleven are often forcibly taken from their homes for military duty in the Tatmadaw, the Burmese army. According to a recent United Nations report commissioned by former Czech president Vaclav Havel and Nobel Peace Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu, Burma currently has the largest number of child soldiers in the world, an estimated 70,000.

These children do not have access to even the most basic of needs: proper schooling, and a safe family environment.

Even those children that escape the military are frequently subjected to forced labour. As a consequence, the Burmese youth are often left with no choice but to flee into the jungles with their families to avoid the impending "duties" which frequently lead to torture and death. For some it is too late. Many of the refugees we met personally recounted to us how they had witnessed the deaths of their loved ones from military violence, landmines, or simply from the unbearably harsh conditions of jungle life.

Cambodia has been trying to recover from this dire legacy and move on for over fifteen years now. Burma, however, has not changed in far longer than that. The world can no longer afford to stand idly by while these innocent and unique lives are destroyed.

The unacceptable use of child soldiers and forced labour in Burma must be addressed immediately and with great urgency. We cannot afford to allow young children to regard war and atrocity as an everyday part of life. We cannot afford to lose generations of people to fear, anger, and despair. We must not allow the flicker of hope in their eyes to be dimmed.

The unacceptable use of child soldiers and forced labour in Burma must be addressed immediately and with great urgency. We cannot afford to allow young children to regard war and atrocity as an everyday part of life... We must not allow the flicker of hope in their eyes to be dimmed.

*This opinion piece was published by IPS (Inter Press Service) on 4 April, 2006 and reproduced by various subscribing news outlets.*



## **ASIA'S DEAD END**

**by Lim Kit Siang, Malaysian MP and AIPMC Committee Member**

Led by Senior Gen. Than Shwe, Burma's military junta has ...funded itself through illicit drug sales and human trafficking. It now poses a threat to its neighbors, and the Asia-Pacific region, as a whole.

Little was expected of the Malaysian foreign minister's fact-finding trip to Burma last week, and little was achieved. The minister, Syed Hamid Albar, had a brief audience with Burmese Prime Minister Soe Win, but was denied a meeting with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and trotted home a day early. Yet on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian nations, he called the journey a "success." How so?

Burma was admitted to Asean almost a decade ago — primarily at Malaysia's urging — and has disgraced the 10-member group ever since. Led by Senior Gen. Than Shwe, Burma's military junta has crushed Ms. Suu Kyi's popularly-elected party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), and funded itself through illicit drug sales and human trafficking. It now poses a threat to its neighbors, and the Asia-Pacific region, as a whole.

Asean's efforts to reason with the regime have floundered. The Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus's calls for Burma to move toward democracy have yielded little fruit. Earlier this month, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono tried his hand, suggesting that a gradual democratic transition could benefit soldiers and civilians alike. The Indonesian president secured little, save the appointment of two Indonesian special envoys to the country, neither of whom has any clear mission. International processes — such as the United Nations' referral of Burma to its Security Council — face an uphill battle. However, the U.S. Senate's hearings on Burma and a European meeting on aid to Burma in Brussels — both happening today — are proof that this is an issue that will not go away.

Meanwhile, the situation within Burma is rapidly deteriorating. Safely ensconced in the jungle military fortress of their new capital Pyinmana, the regime has unleashed a new round of public violence to crush nascent pro-democracy movements. On March 17, police and fire brigade personnel lynched former political prisoner Thet Naing Oo at a tea stall in a Rangoon suburb. A few days later, student leader and former political prisoner Min Ko Naing was assaulted after attending the funeral of NLD MP Thein Win. The brutality is leaking into the countryside, too: Earlier this month, the Burmese Army bombarded villages in Karen State with heavy artillery, forcing more than a thousand people to flee their homes.



This isn't just a problem for Asean. Thanks to the generals' broad diversion of funds away from health and education — and towards military spending — Burma is suffering a nationwide HIV/AIDS epidemic. Burmese border regions along the drug trafficking routes into China and India exhibit the highest infection rates. Meanwhile, the generals look the other way as domestic cartels increase the production of heroin and other drugs to offset losses incurred by Burma's general economic deterioration. Bird flu also looms.

**It's time for action. Asia can't afford to wait.**

There's already a solution on the table. In February, the National League for Democracy asked the regime to convene Parliament, which could, in turn, legitimately appoint the military as a transitional administration. Such an arrangement would allow the democratically-elected body to work with the military administration toward a genuine transition to democracy. This sensible formula is a practical solution.

But for the roadmap to make progress, China and India must support it. This is clearly in both countries' self-interest, given how the deteriorating situation within Burma has already started to leak across its porous borders. Asean, too, must own up to its complicity in supporting such a nasty regime for so many years. Only then will the efforts of the international community bear fruit.

It's time for action. Asia can't afford to wait.

*This opinion piece was published on 29 March, 2006, in the Wall Street Journal.*



## **LOSING PATIENCE WITH BURMA**

**by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President**

Ms. Suu Kyi and her fellow pro-democracy leaders have consistently declared their willingness to work with the military authorities...she would not rule out a power-sharing arrangement with the military. Despite serious persecution, the NLD has stood by its commitment to a principled process of dialogue.

The military government in Burma has finally lost the plot and is rapidly turning its few remaining allies into critics. Faced with moves by the United States and other countries to place Burma on the agenda of the United Nations' Security Council, the military government that calls itself the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has responded by digging itself into an even deeper hole.

The regime's rejection of U.N. statements and resolutions over the years was worsened by its defiant boycott of U.N. Special Envoy Tan Sri Razali Ismail. Mr. Razali has now resigned from his post after not even being allowed to visit the country since March 2004. Such treatment of Mr. Razali, a distinguished Malaysian diplomat and former president of the U.N. General Assembly, is a grave insult to both the U.N and Asean.

Mr. Razali, who made 12 trips to Burma between June 2000 and March 2004, was credited with arranging the secret talks between Burmese Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and the regime, which resulted in her release from detention in May 2002. A year later, a regime-sponsored mob attacked Ms. Suu Kyi's entourage in Depayin in northern Burma and she was detained once again, this time under even stricter conditions.

In Oct. 2004, SPDC leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe caused widespread consternation by purging Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt. Last November, he made matters worse by moving Burma's capital from Rangoon to the remote jungle city of Pyinmana without bothering to inform neighboring nations in advance, let alone his own civil servants.

More recently, the SPDC has refused to receive Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, also Asean's special envoy on Burma. This is the latest insult to Asean members who have defended the regime at great cost to their credibility without getting much in return.

For more than seven years, Asean weathered scorn and contempt before finally coming to its senses by issuing a call for moves toward democracy and the release of Ms. Suu Kyi at last month's Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur. At that summit, Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win also agreed to receive Mr. Syed Hamid, who is charged with checking on progress toward democracy. But the regime rejected a suggestion that Mr. Syed Hamid's visit should coincide with Burma's Independence Day on January 4, and continues to stonewall on setting a date.



The SPDC's delaying tactics are turning Asean's already eroded goodwill into frustration and exasperation. On Tuesday, Mr. Syed Hamid warned that "the patience of the international community is wearing thin," and that the delaying of his visit was seen as a deliberate effort to frustrate Asean's efforts to promote dialogue.

**The Burmese generals' increasingly irrational behavior is a sign that it is losing control of the situation.**

Meanwhile, Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), the party that won more than 80% of parliamentary seats in Burma's last election in 1990, has extended another olive branch to the military. Last week, on Burma's Independence Day, the NLD proposed a new "supreme leading body" that would bring together the military rulers, political parties and ethnic groups as a prelude to democracy.

Ms. Suu Kyi and her fellow pro-democracy leaders have consistently declared their willingness to work with the military authorities. Ms. Suu Kyi has previously declared she would not rule out a power-sharing arrangement with the military. Despite serious persecution, the NLD has stood by its commitment to a principled process of dialogue.

On the other hand, the military's lopsided version of dialogue has seen handpicked representatives shepherded into isolated accommodation and only allowed to utter pre-approved speeches within a dictated agenda. The current conduct of the illegitimate and unrepresentative National Convention to draft a new constitution is proof that the SPDC needs some serious re-education over what constitutes dialogue.

Mr. Razali's warning on Monday that the SPDC would find itself on a collision course with the U.N. Security Council is unsurprising. The regime has annoyed its traditional domestic and international allies, and further antagonized its critics. Gen. Than Shwe has shot himself in the foot so many times it is astonishing he has any toes left.

The Burmese generals' increasingly irrational behavior is a sign that it is losing control of the situation. The business community that nominally supported military rule are now starved of profits, as the few remaining business opportunities are given only to Gen. Than Shwe's favorites. Civil servants were given just 48 hours' notice to move (without their families) to incomplete facilities in the new capital and will be treated as army deserters and enemies of the state if they try to resign or flee. Diplomats and foreign "experts" who previously advocated appeasement have found their access to the leadership relegated to functionaries lower down the hierarchy.



It is time for a unified approach to put Burma on the agenda of the Security Council without delay. Such a move would embolden moderates within the SPDC to take a stand in favor of genuine dialogue and a negotiated political settlement. Without this, Burma will only degenerate further into chaos that will drag down its neighbors with it.

Even the premature move to Pyinmana is a symptom of the SPDC's growing insecurity. Gen. Than Shwe reportedly made the decision on the advice of his astrologer. That Burma's top leader would rather endure the administrative chaos resulting from incomplete buildings, lack of utilities and grossly inadequate communications than ignore his fortune teller is an omen of his state of mind. Clearly, Gen. Than Shwe is on the defensive-that's why he snubbed Asean and the U.N. without thinking through the consequences.

It is time for a unified approach to put Burma on the agenda of the Security Council without delay. Such a move would embolden moderates within the SPDC to take a stand in favor of genuine dialogue and a negotiated political settlement. Without this, Burma will only degenerate further into chaos that will drag down its neighbors with it.

*This opinion piece was published on 13 January, 2006, in the Wall Street Journal.*



## **TURNING THE SCREWS ON MYANMAR**

**by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President**

Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, the Foreign Minister, will be taking along an important checklist when he leaves for Myanmar next week. He will be Asean's special envoy dispatched to determine what exactly the Myanmar authorities are doing to resolve the political and economic deterioration that affects millions of people. It is this ongoing crisis of governance that remains a millstone around Asean's neck.

He will be Asean's special envoy dispatched to determine what exactly the Myanmar authorities are doing to resolve the political and economic deterioration that affects millions of people. It is this ongoing crisis of governance that remains a millstone around Asean's neck.

The weight of this responsibility is significant because Malaysia was the loudest voice in support of Myanmar's Asean membership eight years ago. Asean's efforts to protect Myanmar from international pressure merely emboldened the Myanmar Government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), to diversify its violations and intensify its misrule. The last Asean Summit, however, confirmed Malaysia's own position with regard to reforms in Myanmar.

Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister expressed in no uncertain terms that democracy must be realised there.

There has been much speculation over what Syed Hamid will do in Myanmar and what he will report after his trip. While sceptics may criticise the trip as a last-ditch venture to find "bullets" for Asean's "guns" to defend the regime, many Myanmar themselves hope that Malaysia will be a catalyst for genuine reforms in their country. After all, it was Malaysian diplomat Tan Sri Razali Ismail who brought forth the "secret talks" between democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the regime in 2000, and it was the Malaysian Parliament's Myanmar Caucus that kick-started unprecedented regional pressure by legislators to deny Myanmar the Asean 2006 chair.

We should be very clear that this trip is a mission that must deliver results. It should not degenerate into a courtesy visit for the Myanmar authorities to trot out their usual platitudes about "step-by- step" democratisation efforts when it is patently clear that they have been marching backwards.

It should not degenerate into (another opportunity) for the Myanmar authorities to trot out their usual platitudes about "step-by- step" democratisation efforts when it is patently clear that they have been marching backwards.



Suu Kyi herself has said that she is willing to co-operate with the authorities for the sake of genuine national reconciliation. Of course, such co-operation must hinge on principles of equality and openness.

Asean must not be willing to accept any more excuses and empty promises as the SPDC dusts off its so-called roadmap for democracy, which centres on a 12-year-old constitution-drafting process that has steadily lost legitimacy, credibility and representation.

The National Convention to draft a new constitution continues to exclude nine political parties representing 91 per cent of parliamentary seats. Anyone who speaks against it can be sentenced to 20 years' jail. The number of elected Members of Parliament at the National Convention has been reduced to 15, or less than two per cent of the assembly.

This year alone, seven more elected MPs were detained, bringing the total of MPs currently in jail to 13. Khun Tun Oo, MP and chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, was arrested in February and recently sentenced to 90 years in prison. In July, 60-year-old Muslim MP Kyaw Min (a.k.a. Mohammad Shamsul Anwarul Hoque) was jailed for 47 years. His wife and three children were sentenced to 17 years' jail.

Leaders of various ethnic groups, including the Mon and Chin groups, have been rounded up and detained, along with activists from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). Many more remain in jail despite poor health or old age. Others continue to endure terrible conditions in prison despite having served their sentences. It is imperative that Syed Hamid strongly urges that these political prisoners, as well as Suu Kyi and her senior colleagues, are released without further delay.

The Myanmar Government must be encouraged to set aside their fear of Suu Kyi's enduring national popularity. As someone who commands deep respect and trust across Myanmar's diverse society, her role as a conciliator should be valued, not vilified.

Suu Kyi herself has said that she is willing to co-operate with the authorities for the sake of genuine national reconciliation. Of course, such co-operation must hinge on principles of equality and openness.

Syed Hamid also needs to have a frank discussion on how the Myanmar authorities can transform the current roadmap, which has degenerated into a political dead-end, into something that is genuinely inclusive and achieves meaningful reforms. Implementation of a sham process that tramples on human rights and the rule of law will only exacerbate the problems that Myanmar poses to this region.

Syed Hamid, like his father, is known for his strong sense of justice and fairness. I am sure he will add his voice to efforts to secure guarantees that aid agencies be allowed to deliver emergency relief directly to those



who need it. He should be especially concerned about the revelation made in August by World Food Programme director James Morris that the authorities only allowed WFP to deliver a mere 430 tonnes of 5,500 tonnes of rice earmarked for mostly Muslim communities in North Arakan state.

The “to-do” list is indeed a long and significant one, but our Foreign Minister, with the support of other Asean countries, will be able to proactively engage the Myanmar Government on key issues. The credibility of Malaysia and Asean, as well as the destiny of the people of Myanmar, is at stake.

We have confidence in Syed Hamid’s abilities and talents to transform what others may consider a “mission impossible” into a possibility of peace and democracy for the long-suffering people of Myanmar. Bon voyage.

...the authorities only allowed WFP to deliver a mere 430 tonnes of 5,500 tonnes of rice earmarked for mostly Muslim communities in North Arakan state.

*This opinion piece was published on 28 December, 2005, in the New Straits Times.*



## **GOOD GOVERNANCE AND GOOD NEIGHBOURS**

**by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President**

It is critical that we maintain the momentum that has propelled Asean towards considerable level of success in fostering democracy. We should never allow our efforts to be eroded by the effects of one country's misrule, even if it is that of fellow Asean member Myanmar.

Good governance is a fundamental right that is interlinked with human rights, democracy, rule of law, stability and the eradication of poverty.

Most members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have taken the commitment to good governance seriously. Malaysia has embraced Islam Hadhari as the approach to good governance and social justice to benefit all Malaysians, regardless of race or religion.

It is critical that we maintain the momentum that has propelled Asean towards considerable level of success in fostering democracy. We should never allow our efforts to be eroded by the effects of one country's misrule, even if it is that of fellow Asean member Myanmar.

This is why, a year ago, a group of Asean MPs formed the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC).

Our main aims were to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and to prevent the Myanmar regime from chairing Asean in 2006. As we proceeded with our programme, we were told that we were pursuing an impossible dream - Asean would never budge on such treasured traditions as the rotating chair.

Well, we achieved half of that dream. At the end of July, the unthinkable happened - the pressure, concern and "active persuasion" over the Asean chair led to Myanmar's withdrawal.

This is the first time that parliamentarians have crossed party and national boundaries to work together to support democratisation within our own region. In doing so, we have come in direct confrontation with Asean's precious tenet of "non-interference".

In April, I wrote an article in the Asian Wall Street Journal that identified Myanmar's regime as a threat to regional security. Months later, the same analysis was echoed in a report commissioned by Nobel Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu and former Czech President Vaclav Havel.

They have asserted, just as we have, that the misrule in Myanmar continues to pose a security threat. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled Myanmar as refugees and illegal migrant workers. The absence of good governance has also contributed to the thriving drug trade and the spread of HIV/AIDS.



Our efforts toward good governance will always be threatened by the spill-over effects of Myanmar's misrule. It is clear that our destinies as neighbouring countries are linked, and we need to seriously address good governance as a regional issue.

Regional good governance must be a fundamental right for Asean citizens. Without regional stability, how are we going to achieve economic integration and sustainable economic growth? The Myanmar authorities have refused to publish national economic statistics since 2002. With the chaos started last month by Myanmar's 800 per cent rise in fuel prices and sudden decision to move the capital, the situation could be worse than we imagine.

Asean Governments need to seriously review the relevance of the so-called "non-interference principle". We should not be willing to politely ignore the misbehaviour of a neighbour when the consequences impinge on our internal and regional stability. We must not allow "non-interference" to blind us to the suffering of 50 million of our own neighbours.

It is time the Asean Charter becomes more responsive to the needs of our people. We need an Asean that is credible, pragmatic and practical when it comes to addressing conflicts of interest and security.

We need an effective mechanism to deal with the effects and causes of poor governance and misrule. Without a realistic approach to prevent the escalation of threats caused by bad governance, we are disempowering ourselves.

What I am saying may not be considered polite or diplomatic. However, it is the responsibility of elected representatives to speak up and defend the rights of the people who entrusted us with their votes.

We cannot afford to be shortsighted and ignore the fact that our local and national interests are affected by regional problems.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains detained in Myanmar, has asked us: "Use your liberty to promote ours." It is a call that applies not just to Myanmar but to the entire region.

Southeast Asia has a rich tradition of struggle for human rights, democracy and justice. We have struggled against colonialism and, in more recent times, against dictatorship.

**Asean Governments need to seriously review the relevance of the so-called "non interference principle". We should not be willing to politely ignore the misbehaviour of a neighbour when the consequences impinge on our internal and regional stability...We need an Asean that is credible, pragmatic and practical when it comes to addressing conflicts of interest and security.**



Good governance and democracy are not magic wands that will instantly erase our problems. However, this is the continuation of a struggle for dignity and freedom that we cannot afford to abandon. We cannot accept compromises or excuses. Such lack of conviction betrays the vision of what Asean is supposed to be standing for.

Thousands have given up their lives and liberty so that we, the citizens of Asean, can enjoy freedom and development.

We should not squander the sacrifices of those who came before us. Our national commitment to accountability must be reflected at the regional level if we are to secure our collective destinies.

Good governance and democracy are not magic wands that will instantly erase our problems. However, this is the continuation of a struggle for dignity and freedom that we cannot afford to abandon. We cannot accept compromises or excuses. Such lack of conviction betrays the vision of what Asean is supposed to be standing for.

We cannot afford to surrender our future to the outmoded idea of “non-interference”.

*This opinion piece was extracted from Zaid Ibrahim's speech at the AIPMC Conference on Good Governance, Democracy and Asean held in Kuala Lumpur on 2-3 December, 2005 and published in the New Straits Times on 8 December, 2005.*



## **STANDING UP TO BURMA'S DRUG-LORD GENERALS**

**by Jon Ungphakorn, Thai Senator and AIPMC Member**

The news blackout imposed by Myanmar's military junta on its decision to forego its turn as chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) next year shows that it has received a severe blow to its prestige. Indeed, the decision was far from voluntary.

Junta leader Senior General Than Shwe "lost face" and promptly disappeared from public view so completely that some Myanmar thought he had died.

The protagonists that pressured the regime into relinquishing the Asean chair were not the usual Western human rights campaigners, but Myanmar's closest Asean neighbours.

This must have made the retreat doubly painful for the generals, as Asean was previously one of the junta's strongest shields against international pressure.

For Asean, the episode was a lesson in assertiveness. It showed that persistent pressure works better than the "constructive engagement" that it had pursued, to no avail, for the eight years since Myanmar joined the organisation.

This shift has been led by an embryonic grouping of elected regional parliamentarians known as the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Democracy in Myanmar (AIPMC), of which I am a member.

Established last November to spur progress on democratisation in Myanmar, parliamentarians from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Cambodia took the unprecedented step of crossing national and party lines to review critically Asean policy on Myanmar, seek the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and disqualify Myanmar from chairing.

Now, we will move for the suspension of Myanmar's membership of Asean unless Suu Kyi and other political prisoners are released and clear progress towards democracy is made through negotiations involving the Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and representatives of the various ethnic groups.

When Myanmar joined Asean in 1997, there were only 210,000 Myanmar refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the region. Now, nearly one million people have fled Myanmar's political and economic chaos for neighbouring countries, and another million people remain internally displaced.



My own country, Thailand, receives up to 900 million amphetamine pills from Myanmar every year, and about a third of our regular drug users are below the age of 16. If this is the impact on Thailand, what about the young people and children of Myanmar, who have been restricted from access to education, information, and health care?

As elected legislators in Asean's established and budding democracies, the members of AIPMC feel that our voices have merit and legitimacy. We know that Myanmar's political destiny is inextricably linked to that of our own countries.

When Myanmar joined Asean in 1997, there were only 210,000 Myanmar refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the region. Now, nearly one million people have fled Myanmar's political and economic chaos for neighbouring countries, and another million people remain internally displaced.

Our youth are at an all-time high risk of drug addiction from the massive flow of narcotics, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), from Myanmar, while the generals there maintain congenial ties with notorious drug lords.

In mid-September, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime admitted that Myanmar and China were the world's top producers of ATS. Amphetamine drugs produced in eastern Myanmar seem to be transported with such ease that significant quantities have been found in northeast India, on Myanmar's western border.

That, together with the heroin that is trafficked from Myanmar to India, China, Thailand, and other countries in the region, poses a serious threat to our political and economic security.

It is both tragic and inevitable that the areas of India and China bordering Myanmar now suffer from those countries' highest concentration of drug addiction and HIV infection.

My own country, Thailand, receives up to 900 million amphetamine pills from Myanmar every year, and about a third of our regular drug users are below the age of 16. If this is the impact on Thailand, what about the young people and children of Myanmar, who have been restricted from access to education, information, and health care?

It is scandalous that drug lords enjoy more freedom to operate than aid agencies, while basic access to food, education and health care suffers many restrictions, with up to 70 per cent of Myanmar's children chronically malnourished in some border areas.

Indeed, in August, World Food Programme executive director James Morris revealed that the WFP had delivered only 430 tonnes of the 5,500 tonnes of rice earmarked for vulnerable people in Myanmar's northern Arakan State because of restrictions imposed by the regime.



Two weeks later, the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria pulled its funding for programmes in Myanmar, citing government restrictions that had created “an impossibly difficult environment”.

Preventing aid from reaching those in need is bad enough. But Myanmar’s regime actually perpetuates conditions that sustain and worsen the HIV/AIDS epidemic by restricting access to counselling, medication and other support services.

In order for HIV/AIDS programmes to be effective and sustainable, affected communities must have the freedom to organise and empower themselves. Only then can they be assured access to the resources essential for treatment options.

Suu Kyi’s eloquent plea, “Please use your liberty to promote ours”, has special resonance for us in AIPMC, who enjoy the benefits of representative democracy.

This is why we feel obligated to call on the highest levels of the international community — including the UN Security Council — to address the question of Myanmar, for we must show that we are serious about peace, democracy and human rights. The courageous people of Myanmar, like people everywhere around the world, deserve what far too many of us take for granted.

It is scandalous that drug lords enjoy more freedom to operate (in Myanmar) than aid agencies, while basic access to food, education and health care suffers many restrictions, with up to 70 per cent of Myanmar’s children chronically malnourished in some border areas.

*This opinion piece was distributed by Project Syndicate and published in The Nation on 7 October, 2005, as well as several other Asian newspapers.*



## **PUBLIC PRESSURE LEADS TO RESULTS IN MYANMAR**

**by Charles Chong, Singaporean MP and AIPMC Committee Member**

...stronger, consistent pressure works better than “constructive engagement.” And this pressure should continue in order that the momentum for change in Myanmar not be lost.

Myanmar’s decision to relinquish its turn at the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations next year shows that persistent pressure works. Although Myanmar’s military junta bills the much-anticipated move as a sacrifice “for the good of Asean,” the decision to defer—significant as it was—must surely be only the first of many steps required of Myanmar towards achieving a genuine democracy. It was a means to an end, rather than an end in itself: the need for reforms in Myanmar remains urgent. For Asean, Myanmar’s decision presents tremendous opportunities. It shows that stronger, consistent pressure works better than “constructive engagement.” And this pressure should continue in order that the momentum for change in Myanmar not be lost.

Asean now needs to demonstrate that it is willing and capable to handle its own conflict resolution in the region by setting out a plan of action for reforms in Myanmar with clear deadlines and standards of achievement. And, this time, it must not tolerate excuses. Myanmar’s military junta, the State Peace and Development Council, has broken promises to Asean many times before, including promises made relating to the release of National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Each time, the SPDC has been let off the hook by its neighbours, whom some might regard as overly polite. The issue of Myanmar’s chairmanship has forced a refreshing frankness from some of its members. Asean leaders in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines have broken tradition to speak up publicly in favour of a deferral.

Although there were those who cautioned that having to make a decision under these circumstances was entering uncharted territory and should have been avoided at all costs, the more enlightened, recognizing that one country’s misdemeanours have a direct impact on all the others, saw the issue as a demonstration of new maturity within the region.

The Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus is a group of parliamentarians in the region which is demanding that Myanmar’s military government be denied the Asean chairmanship until it releases all its political prisoners and restores democracy. The other members and I would like to think that we have helped bring this issue to the fore. Asean’s economic engagement and quiet diplomacy with Myanmar over the years have not resulted in genuine real reforms, so it is time for a



more proactive approach. The creation of the Asean Inter-Parliamentarian Myanmar Caucus last year, and of the Singapore Parliamentarian Caucus for Myanmar last month, are steps in that direction.

Even with Myanmar relinquishing the chair of Asean, the pressure on the SPDC leadership to make good on its promises to the grouping must continue. And this will require a far more resolute leadership of Asean—one that is prepared to make hard decisions. Asean can start with a strong demand for the unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the approximately 1,000 political prisoners still being held in Myanmar. Although over 240 prisoners were released earlier this month, other political detainees are now being rounded up to replace them. It can also recognize that “constructive engagement” (which the less tactful might call political inaction) has not only failed to bring about change in Myanmar, but is making a mockery of Asean which is now seen, in some quarters, as being complicit in the derailing of democratization in that country.

One must also acknowledge that the SPDC's rule in Myanmar faces several challenges, the most pressing of which is the uneasy coexistence it leads with several armed minority and ethnic groups. The best solution would be for the junta, NLD and the various other groups to conduct multi-party dialogues to reach a consensus for the good of the country.

Although such complex processes take time, it's encouraging that such dialogues between the pro-democracy and ethnic groups have begun in small pockets within the country, and on its borders. Asean should still try to encourage such dialogues, as the regional body stands to gain from increased stability within Myanmar.

In the eight years since Myanmar joined Asean on July 23, 1997, the generals have done little to move the country toward becoming a democracy. Elected members of parliament from the 1990 elections continue to be imprisoned while the NLD, which won 81% of the seats in the last general election, has been excluded from the National Convention and thus from helping to draft a new constitution. The country's other indicators of development have not improved either: measured by the state of its health service, education standards or economy, Myanmar languishes among the worst-ranked globally and the people of Myanmar remain among the poorest in the world, despite the country's rich natural resources. In its 2005 Index of Economic Freedom, issued in May, the Heritage Foundation ranked Myanmar second to last, freer than North Korea but more economically oppressed than everyone else.

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In the face of these facts, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that good governance, a concept that is taking root among governments, businesses and civil society in most Asean countries, is almost nonexistent in Myanmar. Add to this the many well-documented cases of human rights abuses that are presently taking place, the estimated one million internally displaced people forced from their lands and the arbitrary detentions imposed on persons in Myanmar, and it must surely seem immoral and unacceptable to silently “engage” under the pretence of normalcy. Doing so over the past eight years has cost Asean its image, prestige and credibility, while the junta has used it as a convenient shield against international criticism. Admitting that “constructive engagement” was a mistake would not be wrong. Pretending it is still relevant going forward would be inexcusable.

*This opinion piece was published on 28 July, 2005, in the Asian Wall Street Journal. A shorter version of it was also published in other editions of the Wall Street Journal under the title “Destructive Engagement”*



## TIME FOR ASEAN TO STOP DITHERING

by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President

ASEAN has been dithering on how to deal with its perpetual problem child, Burma. Over the past eight years, ASEAN has tried to prod Burma towards democratisation and national reconciliation with economic-led engagement, peer association by admitting it as a member and at times by simply ignoring the problem so Burma wouldn't feel pressured. ASEAN needs a new approach.

The time for accepting the bitter taste of Burma's empty promises and excuses has expired. It is now time for ASEAN to assert its self-respect and take a stand. Why should ASEAN passively wait for Burma to make up its mind on the issue of the ASEAN chair? In recent months, there has been an unprecedented chorus of disapproval at the notion of the Burmese regime chairing ASEAN. From the memorable outburst of former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir warning of possible expulsion from ASEAN to the more carefully crafted messages of Singaporean foreign minister George Yeo, Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman Marty Natalegawa and others, senior voices in ASEAN are delivering a message that they are not comfortable with a Burmese chair.

In the meantime, the Burmese authorities have done little to convince us that it is capable of bearing the responsibilities that go with the chair. The Burmese authorities, who have not only obstructed ASEAN's progress, but also lack the barest shred of credibility, are far from capable of living up to the burden of chairmanship.

ASEAN needs a chair that is capable of forging ahead with the complex agenda of this region. Many key issues that affect this region, ranging from transnational crime, drug trafficking, mass migration and sectarian conflicts to life-threatening epidemics, need to be addressed adequately. We need to be more concerned about these pressing issues instead of worrying about how Senior-General Than Shwe feels about us or how he will react to what we say.

Even now, as the Burmese authorities attempt to allay regional concerns with this week's prisoner releases, we note that they have still failed to fulfil their promise to commence genuine political reform, including national reconciliation with ethnic groups and the release of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

ASEAN must have more self-respect than to accept leadership by a regime that rules not by the voice of the people, but by the barrel of a gun, by a regime that has consistently failed to honour its promises.

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No other member in the 38-year history of ASEAN has garnered such negative attention for the entire group, made its main “contribution” to the region in the form of drug trafficking, refugees and HIV/Aids or been the sole cause of multiple cancelled meetings between the group and key dialogue partners.

ASEAN should no longer be a buffer for Burma, which has come at the expense of ASEAN’s reputation and productivity. No other member in the 38-year history of ASEAN has garnered such negative attention for the entire group, made its main “contribution” to the region in the form of drug trafficking, refugees and HIV/Aids or been the sole cause of multiple cancelled meetings between the group and key dialogue partners.

This has created a sense of exasperation and frustration within ASEAN. However, this crisis also allows ASEAN to seize an opportunity that lies at the heart of the debate on the Burmese chairmanship and seize it.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) has brought together legislators across national and party lines from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia. The uniting principle of the AIPMC is review of the methods for promoting democracy and reconciliation in Burma within the context of ASEAN. While the chair is a key opportunity, it is not the pinnacle of our common objective of democratisation in Burma.

ASEAN has an opportunity to safeguard its dignity, enhance its relevance and make an unprecedented and meaningful contribution to supporting democracy in Burma. The AIPMC’s “new deal” is to defer Burma’s chairmanship for one year, to condition the chairmanship on Burma’s transition to democracy and national reconciliation and to encourage this “home-grown” process within ASEAN.

While the details are to be left up to the people of Burma, ASEAN must safeguard such an overture by making it clear that it will not be swindled by clever diversions and verbose rhetoric. Nothing less than a detailed time frame that is fully inclusive of all stakeholders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, imprisoned Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo and other ethnic nationality leaders, will be acceptable.

The orchestration of elaborate conventions, convened under draconian principles and without the participation of key stakeholders, is not an indicator of democratic reform, nor will it be legitimate to serve as a prerequisite for so-called free elections. A mere facade of political reform will not lead to stability and progress in Burma and will not alleviate the impact throughout the region. ASEAN stands ready to assist Burma, but ASEAN’s goodwill must be met with the Burmese government’s political will.

ASEAN must realise that the issue of Burma cannot be shelved again. Our new deal is essentially a plan of action; a form of diplomacy ASEAN has effectively utilised on other situations. Suggestions that supporting



Burma's chairmanship will maintain ASEAN's leverage with the Burmese government uses the same mistaken logic as in 1997, when Burma was admitted into ASEAN without any specific plan of action and timetable for reform. Using the same reasoning with the chairmanship will only deliver the same results: nothing.

Allowing Burma to assume the chairmanship would essentially be a validation of their tradition of broken promises and thus reduce the leverage ASEAN has with Burma. ASEAN doesn't just need a spotlight on Burma, it needs a plan of action. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that 2006 would be the year for democracy in Burma.

The AIPMC's new deal rises to the call of the honourable secretary-general.

ASEAN must (make) it clear that it will not be swindled by clever diversions and verbose rhetoric. Nothing less than a detailed time frame that is fully inclusive of all stakeholders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, imprisoned Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo and other ethnic nationality leaders, will be acceptable.

*This opinion piece was published on 13 July, 2005, in The Nation, and reprinted in other Asian newspapers.*



## **INDONESIA'S LESSONS FOR BURMA**

**by Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Indonesian MP and AIPMC Vice President**

In many ways, there are clear parallels between what we experienced in Indonesia under Suharto, and the situation the Burmese people still now find themselves. They are characterized, on the one hand, by dictatorial regimes committing human-rights abuses, while on the other, people whose desire for democracy has never been stronger and more resolute.

May is a month for anniversaries in Southeast Asia. Last week, we celebrated the seventh anniversary of Indonesian democracy that followed the collapse of the Suharto regime and three decades of military rule after the reformasi uprising in 1998.

On May 27, it will be 15 years since elections were held in Burma. In 1990, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won an overwhelming majority with over 80% of the seats, with 16 of those seats won by women candidates. Burma's military junta whose party won a meager 2% of the seats, chose to ignore the result — because it thought it could.

These two seemingly unrelated events share the same place in my heart. In many ways, there are clear parallels between what we experienced in Indonesia under Suharto, and the situation the Burmese people still now find themselves. They are characterized, on the one hand, by dictatorial regimes committing human-rights abuses, while on the other, people whose desire for democracy has never been stronger and more resolute.

Even during the darkest days of military rule, many of us who have struggled for reform in Indonesia knew that tyrants, in power by virtue of sheer might alone, would never survive. Despite many detractors who predicted dire consequences of chaos and destruction for an Indonesia without Suharto and a strong military government, we knew the will of the people would eventually prevail and the doom and gloom scenarios prove unjustified.

As it turned out, the speed of Indonesia's transformation from military dictatorship to fledgling democracy proceeded faster than our wildest expectations. Although much still needs to be done and the path ahead is a rocky one, an irreversible direction has been set for my country.

I know that today in Burma ordinary people are fighting the might of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, not with guns but peaceful acts of defiance which are positively courageous. In a country where signatures on a petition can get one arrested, members of the NLD say that nearly half a million people — and the number continues to grow by the day — have signed a petition calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.



This beacon of hope for the Burmese people's desire for freedom has been under custody — in her third house arrest since 1989 — after an attempt on her life on May 30 two years ago during which democracy supporters were attacked by a military-sponsored mob of over 5,000 people. This was provoked by the military's genuine fear for the strength of the people's aspirations for democracy.

The incident in northern-western Burma that became known as the Depayin massacre left scores dead, while the ensuing crackdown — with hundreds arrested — was the most ruthless attack on the democracy movement since the 1988 crackdown on nationwide demonstrations.

Yet despite obvious personal risks, many people in Burma continue to soldier on in the struggle for democracy. And they need our unwavering support and encouragement.

Apologists for the regime, many of whom ironically hail from so-called "free" countries, like to parrot the well-used security arguments that democracy cannot be rushed, and that without the military's "law and order," the country would just fall apart. Such tired, patronizing talk rings hollow around my ears. After all, Indonesia is today Southeast Asia's largest democracy despite these detractors — not because of them.

That's also why the Indonesian caucus for Burma represents parties right across the political spectrum - such is the support in my country for democratic change in Burma. We feel a strong sense of solidarity with our colleagues in Burma because we were in the same boat as them, not so long ago.

While we were struggling against the injustices of the military, the Burmese people's overwhelming vote for democracy in 1990 gave us hope that we could achieve the same in Indonesia, despite what seemed at the time like a hopeless cause in the face of an entrenched military regime and an unshakable dictator.

So it can be with Burma too. Fifteen years may seem like a long time to wait for democracy but it doesn't make the results of the 1990 polls any less valid.

The Burmese regime's National Convention to draft a new constitution cannot possibly be legitimate when nine political parties, including the NLD, which won 91% of the parliamentary seats, have been excluded. This makes a mockery of democracy and any election conducted as a result of this new constitution cannot be credible, especially when the results of the previous general election remain ignored.

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If our fates as a people are becoming inextricably linked, then so should our moral duty to support each other.

With the flowering of democratic change around the region, now's the time for Southeast Asian parliamentarians to take a more proactive stance on Burma. If our fates as a people are becoming inextricably linked, then so should our moral duty to support each other. At this point, supporting their struggle for democracy is the least that Burma's people should expect from us.

*This opinion piece was published on 30 May, 2005, in the Asian Wall Street Journal.*



## **DON'T LET BURMA CAST A STAIN OVER ASEAN**

**by Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP & AIPMC President**

When Burma was allowed to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1997, we were promised that this would lead to better behavior by its military rulers and improve the lives of the Burmese people. Sadly that assumption has proved horribly wrong. Instead the situation has continued to deteriorate in Burma in recent years, as demonstrated by the junta's refusal to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

By allowing its policy of "constructive engagement" to be used as an excuse for inaction, Asean shares in the responsibility for that deterioration and the negative repercussions this has had throughout the region. That's why we can no longer afford to be complacent on Burma. Last November, parliamentarians from across the region took the unprecedented step of crossing national and party boundaries to form the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Democracy in Myanmar. This brings together national caucuses of legislators in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, together with members of the Singaporean and Cambodian parliaments.

Our immediate objectives are to critically review Asean policy on Burma, seek the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and demand that Burma is not allowed to take up its scheduled chairmanship of Asean in July 2006 unless the regime initiates fundamental, democratic reforms.

For too long we, as Burma's neighbors, have, together with its people, suffered the consequences of its government's repressive policies. Refugees fleeing the military regime have adversely affected our economies, public-health systems, and efforts to stamp out human trafficking. When Rangoon joined Asean in 1997, there were 210,000 Burmese refugees and asylum seekers scattered throughout the region. Now there are more than 500,000 according to official statistics, and probably hundreds of thousands more who have not been officially counted. That is further proof, if any is needed, of the failure of the policy of constructive engagement as it has been practiced since Burma's admission.

Our youth are increasingly at risk of drug addiction from the massive flow of narcotics, particularly amphetamine-type stimulants, from Burma. The country's production and shipment of amphetamines has increased to 800 million pills a year, according to U.S. Government estimates, up from several tens of thousands of tablets in 1997. It's clear that such large-scale drug production could only be carried out with the complicity of Burma's ruling generals. And the repercussions extend far beyond Asia. A U.S. federal court in New York recently indicted eight drug

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To those who argue that the future of Burma should be left to the Burmese people to decide, we say that we agree. The Burmese people have clearly voted for democracy when the country held free elections in 1990 and, in taking this stance, we are simply trying to help allow them to decide their future.

traffickers from Burma in absentia for importing \$1 billion worth of heroin into the U.S.

While Asean states suffer the consequences of the regime's actions, the junta continues to treat the regional body with contempt. It slapped Thailand in the face when it tried to build a diplomatic bridge between the junta and the international community through an initiative known as the Bangkok Process. Last November saw an even worse insult, when the regime embarrassed member states by extending Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest just as they were agreeing to keep Burma off the agenda of a summit of Asean leaders.

In the meantime, the situation inside Burma continues to further deteriorate. Earlier this year, ten leaders of the ethnic Shan nationality were detained on charges of treason, which could lead to sentences of life imprisonment. This was a transparent attempt to prevent them from participating in the National Convention charged with drafting a new constitution, which the detained leaders had criticized for its undemocratic procedures and objectives.

Asean has suffered the indignities imposed by the Burmese junta for too long, and allowing it to assume the chairmanship next year will only make the situation even worse. It would, for instance, be comparable to the European Union having allowed Serbia to join and take on the presidency when Slobodan Milosevic was still ruling the country. At one stroke, Asean would see its credibility evaporate in the international arena. At a practical level, it will be difficult to make any progress on pressing issues under a Burmese presidency, since key partners will be reluctant to send high-level delegations to key meetings in Rangoon.

Over the last decade, Asean has evolved into a more politically and economically sophisticated body. As an organization that includes many mature democracies, it is only right that the next stage in that evolution should be to actively promote democracy in the region.

We make no apologies for our stand. To those who argue that the future of Burma should be left to the Burmese people to decide, we say that we agree. The Burmese people have clearly voted for democracy when the country held free elections in 1990 and, in taking this stance, we are simply trying to help allow them to decide their future.

*This article was published on 3 April, 2005, in the Asian Wall Street Journal.*

Refusing to allow Burma to chair Asean next year will make it clear to the military junta that they cannot continue to get away with impunity with breaking promises to the people of their country and the people of this region.



## **STATEMENT: INDIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS' FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA (IPFDB)**

25th May, 2006

The Indian Parliamentarians' Forum for Democracy in Burma (IPFDB) met in New Delhi on 22 May 2006 to discuss the current scenario in Burma.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating political situation and worsening human rights situation in Burma. Political activists inside Burma have been arrested, tortured, imprisoned and killed by the military. Members of the Aung San Suu Kyi led National League for Democracy (NLD) which won the Burmese Parliamentary Elections in 1990 have been targeted and pressured to quit the party by the regime.

Moreover, we are also aware that the Burmese army has launched its biggest military campaign in recent memory against the ethnic Karen and others in eastern Burma. It is reported that Burmese troops have uprooted more than 15,000 ethnic minorities as part of attacks on civilians that includes killing, torture, and the burning of villages.

Nobel peace laureate and opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has been in prison or under house arrest in the country for the last three years, with her telephone disconnected and all visitors barred apart from her housemaid and doctor.

We welcome the move of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to hold an unprecedented briefing on Burma as well as the recent visit of UN's under Secretary General Mr. Ibrahim Gambari to Burma. We see this trip as a positive step since he was able to see the detained democratic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. But we still need to wait and see whether the regime's move was just to rebuff the growing international criticism on its human rights abuses. The UN Security Council is expected to have a briefing on Burma by Mr. Gambari next week and we hope that the UN will be more actively involved in Burma's national reconciliation and democratization process.

We feel that the Indian government should take a stronger stand against Burma's military which failed to bring the country and its long suffering people any closer to democratic transition. Let us not forget our own freedom struggle and the fact that many Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Prime Minister Nehru had languished in jails.

We feel that the Indian government should take a stronger stand against Burma's military which failed to bring the country and its long suffering people any closer to democratic transition. Let us not forget our own freedom struggle and the fact that many Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Prime Minister Nehru had languished in jails.



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The situation in Burma affect India's peace and security since Burma is sharing 1600 km border with India. Regional security will continue to be affected by a paranoid and unstable regime that is intent on flooding drugs and refugees to its neighbours.

The IPFDB hopes that the Government of India will not shy away from bringing about political reforms in Burma just because of its economic interests and energy requirements.

Many political analysts and international campaigners have expressed hope in the crucial and important role that India can play and are urging for India's active involvement in the democratization process in Burma.

The Indian Government should take into consideration the international expectations especially when the United Nations itself has made such attempts and thus the Government should review its policy on Burma.

We urge the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), ruling military regime in Burma to consider the power-sharing transitional arrangement proposed by the NLD and convene the Parliament.

We urge the SPDC not to extend the period of Aung San Suu Kyi's detention and immediately release her and to start meaningful dialogue with NLD to solve the political problems in Burma.

IPFDB wishes to reiterate its strong support for the Aung San Suu Kyi-led democracy movement and for national reconciliation in Burma.



## A YEAR OF DECEIT BY THE SPDC

### NO TIMETABLE FOR NATIONAL CONVENTION

- In May 2005 Sr Gen Than Shwe told UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Jakarta that the national convention was going well and could be completed by the end of 2005.<sup>1</sup>
- SPDC has maintained that it will allow for democratic rule once the national convention completes the drafting of a new constitution. The process has already taken about 15 years and has been subjected to lengthy recesses.<sup>2</sup>
- On 11 October 2005 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar said SPDC leaders, including Sr Gen Than Shwe, expressed concerns that bringing democracy could create social instability. Syed Hamid said, “They [the SPDC} want to ensure that the environment is conducive without chaos for them to introduce democracy...They said they want to avoid a situation like Iraq, which is gripped by violence.”<sup>3</sup>
- In August 2005 AIPMC President Zaid Ibrahim hoped that Malaysia and the Philippines, ASEAN chairs for 2006 and 2007 respectively, would ensure that reforms were implemented in Myanmar. He said ASEAN had clout since it provided more than half of Myanmar’s foreign investment.<sup>4</sup>
- On 6 January 2006 Indonesian FM Hassan Wirajuda said, “We ask Myanmar to show measured democratic progress within the dateline and timeframe of the roadmap of democracy. He added that there were gaps between what Myanmar had agreed as an ASEAN member and the reality on the ground on matters relating to democracy and the rule of law.”<sup>5</sup>

### MYANMAR’S REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION

- In August 2005 Sr Gen Than Shwe said, “Myanmar has contributed to the maintenance of peace and security, economic and socio-cultural development in the Southeast Asian region.” He continued, “It has also in some way contributed to the endeavor of Myanmar in establishing a modern, developed and peaceful nation.”<sup>6</sup>

### Economic Contributor?

- In mid-February 2006 Myanmar’s Minister of National Planning and Economic Development Soe Tha says in *The Myanmar Times*, “In 2004, the Burmese economy expanded 12 percent, but in 2005 it has expanded 12.2 percent.”<sup>7</sup>
- Sein Htay, a Myanmar economic analysts contests, “The government figure is high because they calculate at a constant price instead of at current or market price.”<sup>8</sup> Economic analysts say that the real figure is probably closer to 1.5 percent.<sup>9</sup>



### **Myanmar's "War on Drugs"**

- The 1 March 2006 report by the US State Dept claims that while Myanmar has made strides in the reduction of opium production, it still remains the # 2 producer in the world behind Afghanistan. The report points out that while Myanmar has made arrests and seizures, it has failed to report on the destruction of production facilities.<sup>10</sup>
- In June 2006 a new report is released by the Palaung Women's Organization highlighting increased opium production and addiction in northern Shan State. This exposes the lie of the supposedly successful drug eradication programs touted by the military junta.<sup>11</sup>

### **Illegal timber trade**

- On 25 April 2006, an article was published in Mizzima News claiming that despite Myanmar's claims of outlawing logging on the China-Burma border, government officials still have a hand in illegal logging scams. "Bribing the officials to get permission to cut down timbers is common here," the journalist said. He added that more than 100 Chinese businessmen were believed to be involved in such scams.

### **New Karen Refugee Wave**

- Having originally attributed the exodus of thousands of Karen to the Thai border to an internal struggle within the KNU, at a news conference in May 2006, Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan contradicted himself in saying that 'aggressive tactics' of the KNU had forced the SPDC to boost security around the new capital at Pinyinmana.<sup>12</sup>

### **BUMPY ROAD TO DEMOCRACY**

#### **"Disciplined Democracy"**

- On 19 June Lt-Gen Thein Sein said the Army was "trying to shape the nation with a fully-institutionalized disciplined democratic system which is in conformity with its culture, traditions, customs and way of life."<sup>13</sup>

#### **Roadmap includes detention of eight Shan political leaders**

- On 7 November 2005 the US State Department releases a statement condemning the secret trials and sentencing of eight Shan political leaders to lengthy prison terms. Spokesperson Adam Ereli said, "These actions demonstrate that the junta's so-called "Roadmap to Disciplined Democracy" is neither credible nor inclusive."<sup>14</sup>
- On 22 November 2005 the SPDC threatened not to release the Shan leaders if Shan political groups made too much noise about the incident.<sup>15</sup>



- By the end of 2005, seven more elected MPs had been detained, bringing the total of imprisoned Members of Parliament to 13. Hkun Htun Oo, MP and chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, was sentenced to 90 years in prison, with Shan State Peace Council Chairman (SSPC) Gen Hso Ten sentenced to 106 years. In July, 60-year-old Muslim MP Kyaw Min was jailed for 47 years. His wife and three children were sentenced to 17 years' jail.

### **SPDC Attacks the NLD**

- On 26 April 2006 The SPDC labels the NLD a “terrorist” organization.<sup>16</sup> SPDC information minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Hsan said the NLD “has connections with expatriate groups, terrorists and destructive groups.” The SPDC claims it is under attack by an elaborate terrorist plot.<sup>17</sup>
- In late April 2006 the SPDC begins claiming through its New Light of Myanmar newspaper that members of the NLD have been resigning from the party. The opposition asserts that people are resigning because of increasing pressure by the police to do so.<sup>18</sup>

### **Democracy still long overdue**

- In March 2006 Sr Gen Than Shwe said during his Armed Forces Day speech that the transition to democracy would still take “some time”, a direct contradiction of his recent promises made to neighboring countries.<sup>19</sup>

### **Su Su Nway Released - For Now**

- On 6 June 2006 the junta released political prisoner Su Su Nway, in compliance with one of the three prerequisites established by ILO for its continued involvement in Myanmar. This bend to political pressure discredits the junta's claim that its judiciary was acting independently when Su Su Nway was convicted, and that the arrest was politically motivated and unlawful.<sup>20</sup> Soon after her release, Su Su Nway told DVB Radio she harbors no illusions that her freedom will last: “As long as there is no democracy, we will have to return to prison, to this place. I know that when I go out and start my activities, they will re-arrest me.”

### **ASEAN LEFT IN THE DARK**

- On 11 December 2005 Malaysia FM Syed Hamid Albar said, “We cannot be keeping on promising people, yes, we have seen them and, yes, they are committed to the road-map. We must be able to come back to ourselves and say, yes, I have met Aung San Suu Kyi, yes, I have met with some of the political leaders, and they are really undertaking their own political reconciliation.”<sup>21</sup>



- On 13 December 2005 Thai PM Thaksin said he was “uncomfortable” with Myanmar’s military regime’s failure to keep ASEAN nations informed about political reforms, adding that ASEAN was particularly concerned with the extension of Aung San Suu Kyi’s term of house arrest and the junta’s abrupt move of its capital to Pyinmana.<sup>22</sup>
- In December 2005 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar said, “Enough of talking... We want to see some action.” He said he would soon travel to Myanmar as an ASEAN representative and, “we want to see something very tangible, like perhaps the release of the detained people.”<sup>23</sup>

### **THE JUNTA’S UNWELCOME GUESTS**

- In December 2005 Myanmar FM Nyan Win said, “I will receive any of my ASEAN counterparts as my personal guest.” He added that during Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar’s visit to Myanmar, he would be welcome to witness a round of constitutional talks to demonstrate the country’s commitment and progress toward a “disciplined democracy.”<sup>24</sup>
- In December 2005 Myanmar FM Nyan Win said, “We are ready to accept an envoy, and we’ll willingly describe to him our actual situation.”<sup>25</sup>

### **... but Junta postpones Syed Hamid’s visit indefinitely**

- On 6 January 2006 SPDC FM Nyan Win said that the anticipated visit of Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar would be delayed because the military regime was too busy moving its administrative capital to Pyinmana.<sup>26</sup> Yangon-based politician Win Naing said, “This is just an excuse, a lame excuse. The SPDC agreed to receive the ASEAN delegation while they were relocating their capital.”<sup>27</sup>

### **After being barred for nearly 2 years, UN special envoy resigns**

- “They did not want me to go there for the last 22 months. I cannot do my job if I don’t go there,” said Razali Ismail when he resigned from his position as UN Special Envoy to Myanmar on 8 January, 2006.<sup>28</sup>

### **...yet not too busy for China**

- ASEAN leaders puzzled by the recent trip of Myanmar’s Prime Minister Gen Soe Win to China despite the junta’s claim of being busy, which was cited as reason for postponing the visit by Syed Hamid Albar.<sup>29</sup>

### **Meanwhile, Syed Hamid still waits...**

- On 9 March 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid said, “I have got a specific agenda that was agreed to at the ASEAN summit and agreed to by Myanmar themselves for the purpose of assisting Myanmar to allay the fears of the international community in terms of Myanmar’s direction.”<sup>30</sup>



### **When he finally gets there, he turns around and goes home**

- After only one night in Yangon, ASEAN Special Envoy and Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar cut short his visit on March 24, 2006, citing the military leadership's refusal to allow a meeting with detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The generals told Syed Hamid that Aung San Suu Kyi is no longer relevant. The ASEAN Special Envoy obviously did not agree. He left Myanmar stating that he would return only when allowed to meet with all "stakeholders," indicating that Suu Kyi and the NLD are still very relevant in the eyes of ASEAN.

### **MYANMAR'S NEGLECTED FRIEND**

- In Western Myanmar, security forces have been focusing efforts against the NSCN (Khaplang) while allowing rebel groups such as the ULFA and PLA of Manipur who are at war with the India government to operate unchecked. Armed Meiti rebels captured inside of Myanmar have been released instead of being turned into the Indian authority.<sup>31</sup>
- Narcotics and arms continue to cross the Indo-Myanmar border with the assistance of the Myanmar military.<sup>32</sup>
- In December 2005 Yangon backed away from a deal to supply India with natural gas and inked instead an agreement with Hong Kong-based Petro China.<sup>33</sup>

### **FORCED LABOR**

- In May 2006 the ILO started to seriously consider taking Myanmar to the International Court of Justice for continued use of forced labor. The ongoing human rights abuse violates the 1930 Convention on Forced Labor, to which Myanmar is a signatory.
- ILO representative in Yangon, Richard Horsey reports that the regime is harassing those who visit his office to complain about the practice. As a result the ILO has asked Horsey to not follow up any further cases out of concern for the complainants.<sup>34</sup>
- Sr Gen Than Shwe claimed during an International Workers' Day speech: "Certain neo-colonialists manipulating international organizations under the pretext of protecting human rights and workers' rights are leveling accusations at the nation and installing their lackeys in international organizations to harm the interests of Myanmar and national workers."<sup>35</sup>
- The *Trafficking in Persons* Report released by the US State Dept in June 2006 found that the SPDC had at no time taken any action against military or civilian officials who engaged in forced labor.<sup>36</sup>



## Footnotes

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- 30 AP, Malaysian foreign minister 'still hopeful' about trip to Myanmar but no date set, 9 March 2006
- 31 The Statesman, The Burma stalemate: India's policy of unwarranted appeasement, 21 February 2006
- 32 The Statesman, The Burma stalemate: India's policy of unwarranted appeasement, 21 February 2006
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- 34 Irrawaddy, ILO considers taking Burma to Interntional Court of Justice, 31 May 2006
- 35 Irrawaddy, ILO considers taking Burma to Interntional Court of Justice, 31 May 2006
- 36 Irrawaddy, US State Department accuses Burma of Human trafficking, 6 June 2006



## CHRONOLOGY OF RECENT STATEMENTS

- 20 Sept 2005 **“Threat to the Peace” Report released.**
- 23 Sept 2005 Teresa Kok, AIPMC Secretary and Member of Malaysian Parliament: “We urge ASEAN governments to support this move and to lead a multilateral effort to help bring about concrete progress there.”<sup>1</sup> “The AIPMC resolves to call for the suspension of Myanmar from ASEAN if it fails to bring democratic reforms in the country in the next 12 months.”<sup>2</sup>
- 23 Sept 2005 Philippine Congressman Mario Aguja: “We do not have the illusion that things will change immediately inside Myanmar. But we must intensify the pressure and do what is right.”<sup>3</sup>
- 23 Sept 2005 Thai senator Kraissak Choonhavan: “We cannot tolerate this any more[...]We need our respective governments in Asia to do more.”<sup>4</sup>
- 29 Sept 2005 Malaysia’s deputy PM Najib Razak: “[...] constructive engagement has shown some dividends but not as much as we had hoped [...]”<sup>5</sup>
- 3 Oct 2005 Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC president, expressed his support for the proposal of former Czech president Vaclav Havel and Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “I think it’s a good idea. I think we should support that [...] We hope that the Security Council will do something.”<sup>6</sup>
- 8 Oct 2005 SPDC Sec 1, Gen Thein Sein, announced that the National Convention, that was to resume in November, has to be postponed to the end of the year.
- 9-10 Oct 2005 **Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar visited Myanmar.**
- 10 Oct 2005 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar said that Myanmar is taking cautious but definite steps towards its first democratic elections since 1990. “They’re moving towards it slowly but steadily, although some Western countries have been putting pressure, saying that things should be moving much faster. [...] A country that is used to a particular system for so long shouldn’t switch to another style too drastically. [...] I believe that they truly want to move in that direction. [...]”<sup>7</sup>
- 10 Oct 2005 Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC president, speaking at the UN Headquarters in New York City: “The deteriorating situation in Myanmar is affecting not only those within the country, but people outside its borders as well.



[...] You can't have just ASEAN handling it [the Burma issue]...The initiative must come from here [the UN], or from Europe or from America. [...] I think the [UN] secretary general should do that [coordinate an international drive]. [...] The success or failure of initiatives, depends on the big powers, the United States and Europe. It depends on China."<sup>8</sup> "It is normal for big players to talk to another big player because big players don't like to be talked to by small players."<sup>9</sup>

10 Oct 2005 Jon Ungphakorn, Thai Senator and AIPMC member: "The issue of Burma must be given a high profile."<sup>10</sup> "We would all like to see our [ASEAN] governments take a stronger stand on the Burma issue. [...] I think we could then have a very good resolution in the [UN] Security Council."<sup>11</sup>

12 Oct 2005 UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail rejected claims by Myanmar's junta that speeding up democratic reforms could throw the country into Iraq-like disarray: "I don't see any parallels between Myanmar and Iraq. [...] Iraq is a very bad case where unilateralism was allowed to happen. [...] Nobody is talking about taking unilateral action [against Myanmar]."<sup>12</sup>

6 Nov 2005 **SPDC begins moving the capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana.**

7 Nov 2005 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: "Our feeling is that it's not a constructive thing to do in the Security Council. We feel that it may not be a good way to resolve or make things improve. [...] We need interactions with Myanmar. Sometimes people think that we haven't really achieved results, therefore the door (to dialogue) is not useful. But the door remains useful. [...] "<sup>13</sup> "So we hope to keep them engaged and we share the same goal as everyone in the international community - we would like to see national reconciliation, democracy and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as soon as possible."<sup>14</sup>

19 Nov 2005 Malaysian PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi: "[ASEAN's] commitment to continue with the engagement with Myanmar is a strategy that we believe can work. It takes time, it's a little bit slow but I think we cannot be confrontational with Myanmar. That's not the ASEAN way."<sup>15</sup>



- 21 Nov 2005 Philippines President's Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye: "President Arroyo agreed to support efforts in the United Nations, particularly in the Security Council, where the Philippines is currently a nonpermanent member, to help spur democratic reforms."<sup>16</sup>
- 25 Nov 2005 **120 Philippine legislators call for the Philippine government to urge the ASEAN to support inclusion of Myanmar on the UN Security Council agenda.** Legislator Etta Rosales: "[...] Burma is not just a severe human rights problem, but also a continuously growing threat to international peace and security."<sup>17</sup>
- 27 Nov 2005 **SPDC extended the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for another six months.**
- 2 Dec 2005 Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, a senior Malaysian minister, speaking at the AIPMC 'Conference on Good Governance, Democracy and ASEAN' in Kuala Lumpur: "The military junta reminds us of the days of Hitler and Stalin. We must continue to pressure Myanmar to comply to international standards. [...] Would you do business with Hitler and Stalin? We can't be thinking of just business while human rights are abused. I don't think I want to do business with a devil."<sup>18</sup>
- 2 Dec 2005 Zaid Ibrahim, member of the Malaysian Parliament and AIPMC president: "We cannot afford to ignore the fact that our local and national interests are affected by regional problems. [...]"<sup>19</sup>
- 3 Dec 2005 Zaid Ibrahim, member of the Malaysian Parliament and AIPMC President: "We must do something about the [ASEAN] membership of Myanmar. Either a suspension or an expulsion."<sup>20</sup>
- 3 Dec 2005 Philippine Senate minority leader Aquilino Pimentel and AIPMC vice president: "Myanmar has shown it can't be trusted. It should be expelled from the ASEAN."<sup>21</sup>
- 7 Dec 2005 Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo: "What's happening in Myanmar is very sad and a bit of an embarrassment to the ASEAN family. [...] But they are part of the family and we've got to support each other, so I hope the issue will not be too much of a distraction."<sup>22</sup>
- 8 Dec 2005 Teresa Kok, AIPMC Secretary: "All this discussion and international pressure is very much needed."<sup>23</sup>



- 8 Dec 2005 Malaysia FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I think Myanmar realises that we have a problem[...] We are unhappy with the way that democratic processes are pursued there. But the question we always ask ourselves is — if Myanmar is isolated or out, would that be better for their citizenry? It’s not the most perfect situation, but at least we do keep on asking the right questions.”<sup>24</sup> “We have registered our desire to see the political process and the road map [to democracy] show some tangible movement.”<sup>25</sup>
- 8 Dec 2005 Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC president: “They [Asean leaders] are saying they are unhappy with the Burmese government’s performance—at the same time, they don’t take any action.”<sup>26</sup>
- 9 Dec 2005 Malaysia FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I don’t think any single country in ASEAN does not feel impatient and does not feel uncomfortable, because it does create problems and difficulties for us. [...] [Myanmar needs] to be more responsive to the wishes of the international community.”<sup>27</sup> “Myanmar must be able to show a real move towards the roadmap to democracy.”<sup>28</sup>
- 11 Dec 2005 Malaysia FM Syed Hamid Albar: “[...] Myanmar has always asked us to speak on their behalf. I think we have done that for a long time. [...] We cannot be keeping on promising people, yes, we have seen them and, yes, they are committed to the road-map. We must be able to come back to ourselves and say, yes, I have met Aung San Suu Kyi, yes, I have met with some of the political leaders, and they are really undertaking their own political reconciliation.”<sup>29</sup>
- 11 Dec 2005 Indonesian FM Hassan Wirajuda said Southeast Asian leaders were discussing a plan to formally urge Myanmar to speed up democratic reform: “For the time being, we can’t expect the timelines to be established. But at least in our discussion, we expect the process in Myanmar could produce tangible results. We measure in terms of tangible results.”<sup>30</sup>
- 12-13 Dec 2005 **At the ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, SPDC agreed to receive the Malaysian Foreign Minister as ASEAN envoy to Myanmar.**
- 12 Dec 2005 Malaysia FM Syed Hamid Albar: “Enough of talking. [...] We want to see some action. [...] We want to see something very tangible, like perhaps the release of the detained people.”<sup>31</sup> “We encouraged Myanmar to expedite the



process. We also call for the release of those placed under detention.”<sup>32</sup> “The foreign ministers as well as the leaders have told them that it is not sufficient just to say that the constitution drafting process has resumed, and ASEAN needs to see and feel and learn first-hand about any progress to be able to convince the international community on the Burma road to democracy. [...]”<sup>33</sup>

- 12 Dec 2005 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: “[...] the Myanmar prime minister has stated that Myanmar would welcome ASEAN foreign ministers to visit [...] We hope [it] would be a step towards the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.”<sup>34</sup>
- 12 Dec 2005 Former Malaysia PM Mahathir Mohamad: “In a way, it [ASEAN’s new stance on Myanmar] is breaching the non-interference policy, but I suppose the leaders feel they should interfere.”<sup>35</sup>
- 12 Dec 2005 Indonesia FM spokesman Marty Natelegawa: “We wanted to express as strongly as possible our disappointment that the [Myanmar] issue has dragged on and that it remained unresolved, which has implications for the credibility of ASEAN.”<sup>36</sup>
- 14 Dec 2005 Thai Senator Kraisaak Choonhavan: “I think the movement [to Pyinmana] is an entirely unreasonable action, and the [Mynamar] government has not acted in the best interests of its people.”<sup>37</sup>
- 14 Dec 2005 Thai Deputy PM Surakiart Sathirathai: “Thailand feels uneasy about not being kept informed about the latest political movement in Myanmar, [...] not even the relocation of its capital.”<sup>38</sup>
- 15 Dec 2006 UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Razali Ismail welcomed ASEAN’s decision to send their own envoy to Myanmar to check on promised democratic reforms and push for the release of political prisoners: “I’m hopeful that the foreign minister of Malaysia will be able to express the collective sense of impatience and concern about the Myanmar issue discrediting ASEAN, and hopefully this will have an impact on the Myanmar leaders to want to do something.”<sup>39</sup>
- 31 Dec 2005 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I hope my visit will fulfil the goal agreed upon during the conference, which was to see Myanmar gaining democracy. [...] If we leave Myanmar in this current situation, the pressure [...] will not only be on Myanmar, but also ASEAN.”<sup>40</sup>



- 6 Jan 2006 Indonesian FM Hassan Wirajuda: “The Myanmar case has rather disturbed ASEAN’s stability. [...] We ask Myanmar to show measured democratic progress within the dateline and timeframe of the roadmap of democracy.”<sup>241</sup>
- 6 Jan 2006 **SPDC FM Nyan Win announced that the expected visit of Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar had been delayed because the military regime was too busy moving its administrative capital to Pyinmana**<sup>42</sup>
- 8 Jan 2006 UN Special Envoy to Myanmar Razali Ismail resigned. He said: “I have not been allowed to go back [to Myanmar] for the past 23 months. There is no justification for me to go on.”<sup>243</sup>
- 9 Jan 2006 Former UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail: “[...] If ASEAN cannot make an impact or influence, then one way or another it leads to the Security Council.”<sup>244</sup>
- 9 Jan 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “[...] I told them, if I go to Myanmar I have to see all the political parties in Myanmar. Otherwise I think we would lose our credibility. [...] I mentioned to them that they were the ones who gave the date and said that the best time to come is in January. [...] I thought that the best thing is for me to communicate directly with the foreign minister, and he explained to me (the delay was) because of their move to the capital [...] If they want us to speak on their behalf then we need the ammunition.”<sup>245</sup>
- 10 Jan 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “It is to Myanmar’s advantage if they want Asean to be useful. They have to open up with Asean. [...] There is a perception that with Razali leaving, with the ASEAN trip being delayed, we are actually not going anywhere. [...] There is a reason why we would like to make the trip because we would also like to know what’s going on in Myanmar, otherwise we will be caught in an embarrassment.”<sup>246</sup>
- 16 Jan 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “Everybody who sees us will always express their concern about democracy in Myanmar and human rights, but most important is that in ASEAN, we want to do it in a way that is acceptable to Myanmar.”<sup>247</sup> “We hope to cooperate with Myanmar on this visit and get a date fixed.”<sup>248</sup>
- 19 Jan 2006 Razali Ismail: “Nothing is happening now. China must play a bigger role to bring changes in Myanmar.”<sup>249</sup>



- 19 Jan 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: "I think it will be useful to have China and India and the U.S. [...] engage Myanmar."<sup>50</sup>
- 20 Jan 2006 Malaysia's FM Syed Hamid Albar: "If Myanmar is seen as not cooperating, the country would eventually face pressure from all parties [...] the issue may be turned into a topic on the Security Council."<sup>51</sup>
- 20 Jan 2006 Thai Senator Kraisak Choonhavan: "[...] the decision of the government to move the capital to Pyinmana, 400km north of Rangoon, will definitely weaken the state's grip on the people. [...] I think they have put themselves in a mine here. And I would encourage the Burmese people to be ready for an uprising in a few months. If an uprising is popular, I don't think the officers will defend the SPDC. I've heard officers are also quite discontented about what's going on."<sup>52</sup>
- 12 Feb 2006 Razali Ismail: "China has a critical role to play in the efforts to bring reforms and democracy in Myanmar."<sup>53</sup>
- 15 Feb 2006 Malaysia's FM Syed Hamid Albar: "They have not given me the date. I hope they can give me the date as soon as possible before the [ASEAN] retreat."<sup>54</sup>
- 17 Feb 2006 **Official sources said Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono would visit Burma in early March.**
- 17 Feb 2006 Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN secretary-general: "We are frustrated. We feel that diplomatic efforts should produce some concrete step forward [...] It looks like we are losing momentum."<sup>55</sup>
- 17 Feb 2006 Djoko Susilo, Indonesian MP and head of the Indonesian Legislative Caucus for Democracy in Myanmar: "The [Indonesian] President must convince the public his visit will contribute to the development of democracy and human rights in Myanmar. [...] If the President cannot convey this message during his visit, it would be better for him to cancel. There is no use visiting Myanmar without this message."<sup>56</sup>
- 17 Feb 2006 Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Indonesian MP and member of the Indonesian Legislative Caucus for Democracy in Myanmar: "While ASEAN's non-interference policy remains a barrier, [the visit] it's important because the condition in Myanmar will affect the image of Indonesia and ASEAN."<sup>57</sup>



- 23 Feb 2006 Yuddi Chrisnandi, Indonesian MP: “If Indonesia doesn’t pressure the military regime it is the same as giving support.”<sup>58</sup>
- 23 Feb 2006 Thai Senator Kraissak Choonhavan: “We are asking the governments of the ASEAN nations to make a commitment that it will expel Myanmar from the group if its military junta refuses to release all political prisoners and to give its people freedom and rights.”<sup>59</sup>
- 23 Feb 2006 Indonesian President’s spokesman Dino Patti Jalal: “[Indonesia would] assist, if we are asked by Myanmar, to implement their road map to democracy.”<sup>60</sup>
- 23 Feb 2006 Malaysian MP Teresa Kok: “We need to resolve the political stale mate in Burma. Otherwise, there is no way to resolve the refugee problem.”<sup>61</sup>
- 25 Feb 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “Yes [a visit date] has been fixed. But it is better that I do not reveal it.”<sup>62</sup>
- 1-2 Mar 2006 **Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited Burma.** Former Indonesian FM Ali Alatas on the President’s visit: “Our stay here is very short and we have no time for it [meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi].”<sup>63</sup>
- 1 Mar 2006 Indonesian President’s spokesman Dino Patti Djalal: “This is not a situation in which we come to a country and lecture them and demand this and that. [...] If Indonesia can help this democratization process, we will do it smoothly and properly with ways that can open doors, not seal them.”<sup>64</sup>
- 2 Mar 2006 Singapore’s FM George Yeo: “It is in our interest to ensure that we stay engaged in Myanmar [...] but what happens in that country is a source of concern [...] So I think let’s take a realistic approach, we are in no position to affect the course of internal development, what happens there - good or bad - is for the Myanmar people to bear the consequences, but I think we have to distance ourselves a bit if it is not possible for them to engage us in a way which we find necessary if we are to defend them internationally.”<sup>65</sup>
- 3 Mar 2006 Indonesia said it would nominate two special envoys to Burma, one of whom would be Ali Alatas. <sup>66</sup> Presidential spokesperson Dino Patti Djalal: “There will be more communication and dialogue and changes coming. [...] All I can say is we are quite happy with the result of the visit.”<sup>67</sup>



- 7 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “They have not given us a date [for his trip]. We recognise there is a communication problem since they relocated their capital [...] Malaysia has been supportive of a constructive role [...] When we are given a task, we would like to perform the task.”<sup>68</sup>
- 10 Mar 2006 Indonesia FM spokesman Yuri Thamrin called on Myanmar to allow the ASEAN special envoy to visit within the next month to assess its pledges to move toward democracy: “It’s logical to raise this because [Syed Hamid] has a mandate that has to be implemented and reported on.”<sup>69</sup>
- 18 Mar 2006 Indonesia and the SPDC agreed to hold the first meeting of their Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation in Bali, following the ASEAN ministerial retreat.<sup>70</sup>
- 18 Mar 2006 Indonesian FM spokesman Desar: “As we all know, Myanmar has withdrawn from the international world so that it became difficult for people to come to Myanmar as once experienced by a United Nations envoy. And Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s visit to Myanmar has become important to many parties as it marked the first time for Myanmar to receive a top-level foreign official.”<sup>71</sup>
- 19 Mar 2006 **SPDC set a date for the visit of ASEAN special envoy and Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar to check on democratic reforms. The date of the trip remained a secret to avoid excess publicity.**<sup>72</sup>
- 19 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I would not put any expectations [about the visit to Burma]. I hope it is part of a confidence building mechanism. We hope to build trust. Ultimately, it will be Myanmar’s own process.”<sup>73</sup>
- 19 Mar 2006 Zaid Ibrahim, Malaysian MP and AIPMC president: “It is crucial that he meets Aung San Suu Kyi. If not I doubt their [the SPDC’s] sincerity to find a solution.”<sup>74</sup>
- 19 Mar 2006 Lim Kit Siang, Malaysian MP and member of the AIPMC: “I don’t think anybody dares to have an optimistic interpretation of this [Syed Hamid Albar’s visit to Burma]. [...] There have been a lot of difficulties and I’m sure the military junta will try to put on the gloss and try to be seen in the best possible light.”<sup>75</sup>



- 20 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I am hoping to be able to file a report to the foreign ministers’ meeting. [...] We may not get what we want.”<sup>76</sup>
- 21 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I should be going, I am trying to get a flight, I don’t have a flight yet. [...] Insyallah.”<sup>77</sup>
- 23 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar arrived in Rangoon for his 3-day official visit to Burma as ASEAN special envoy.<sup>78</sup>
- 24 Mar 2006 **Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar left Rangoon abruptly, cutting short his visit to Burma.**<sup>79</sup>
- 27 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I would not consider it [the trip] as a total success. [...] I am happy as well as not so happy. [...] Much more needs to be done for ASEAN to be able to convince the international community that there is progress made.”<sup>80</sup> “They [the SPDC] told me Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD no longer have any influence. I told them if that’s the case, let me see them.”<sup>81</sup>
- 28 Mar 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I told them [the SPDC] it would have been better if I had been allowed to meet Suu Kyi and other political leaders as it would be a step towards their democratic reform.”<sup>82</sup>
- 09 Apr 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I did not see any significant development there. [...] We have to be careful because we want to see Myanmar making a positive contribution. [...] We shall also discuss further action that would be taken together with Myanmar.”<sup>83</sup>
- 13 Apr 2006 Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Indonesian MP and AIPMC vice-president: “The relevance of the entire organisation [ASEAN] rests on how effectively it deals with Burma.”<sup>84</sup>
- 17 Apr 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I think there is a feeling that Myanmar is dragging us down in terms of our credibility and image. [...] There is that feeling that we are being held hostage by Myanmar on some of the progress. [...] We started with a very soft approach but it is getting firmer. ASEAN is the last hope before people get impatient and stronger views are taken. [...] ASEAN must discuss this matter frankly. We are not asking Myanmar to change radically; we are asking it to evolve towards change. [...] The Myanmar authorities are supposed to have a road map and implement it. [...] They must convince people and not



only ASEAN, that their plan is on track, that it is really going to happen. [...] But we are not seeing it as yet. [...] We do not want any ASEAN member to decide that it will leave ASEAN, that is not a solution. We do not want Myanmar isolating itself.”<sup>85</sup>

18 Apr 2006 Philippine FM Alberto Romulo: “We are one step closer to the [ASEAN] charter, a charter that builds strength of our diversity and reinforces our commonalities.”<sup>86</sup>

19-20 Apr 2006 **ASEAN Ministerial Retreat in Ubud, Indonesia.**

19 Apr 2006 Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN secretary-general: “Most of ASEAN believe that Myanmar authorities can only move forward if you have certain leverage applied on them. [...] The best way is to work with our neighbors who have better leverage with Myanmar. China and India have common borders with Myanmar. [...] They are also very involved in cross-border trade, in investment, in tourism and in other things. [...] There is a certain impatience because the people around the region as well as around the world say, You keep talking, you keep going there - and then what happened? [...] People want to see some concrete steps forward.”<sup>87</sup>

19 Apr 2006 Indonesia FM Hassan Wirayuda: “The Myanmar issue is difficult for ASEAN. We must admit that, but we should not see it as solely the burden of ASEAN. There are also major key players that have significant influence: China and India. [...] They can help by promoting democracy in Myanmar. They can help in any way they can.”<sup>88</sup>

19 Apr 2006 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: “What we would like to do is to see movement in Myanmar toward national reconciliation with a good and clear timeframe.”<sup>89</sup>

19 Apr 2006 Malaysia’s FM Syed Hamid Albar: “There are still more things to be done. [...] Our intention was to engage with everybody. [...]”<sup>90</sup>

20 Apr 2006 Malaysia’s FM Syed Hamid Albar: “Of course we don’t want to interfere in domestic affairs but [...] if it impacts on ASEAN as a whole, we have an interest to express our view and see what types of action Myanmar has taken. [...] I think when you’re dealing with a country you can say so much, but you can’t force anything upon a country. [...] I imagine it will take them another two years on the completion as Myanmar’s foreign minister informed us it



will be when they have a referendum to adopt the constitution. [...] After that referendum, they will be having an election. [...] They don't want interference in their domestic process. We'll leave it at that and see how we can assist them in whatever way we can. [...] They don't like pressure but they like suggestions from us, so we give suggestions to them. We hope they can convey our suggestions to their own government."<sup>91</sup>

20 Apr 2006 Singapore's FM George Yeo: "We reiterate our position on the importance of Myanmar staying on the roadmap toward democracy and we call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi."<sup>92</sup>

20 Apr 2006 Malaysia's FM Syed Hamid Albar: "We did not come up with any consensus, but we addressed the issue. [...] If Myanmar does not want to make a move, there is nothing we can do."<sup>93</sup>

21 Apr 2006 Malaysia's FM Syed Hamid Albar: "I could sense the frustration and disillusionment among ASEAN foreign ministers. [...] I think we recognised that the Myanmar issue has crept in to disunite ASEAN because there are different views held but we cannot project that to the world. [...] We told Myanmar 'you talked about us helping you but how can we when you don't give us any ammunition'. [...] ASEAN has always been the initiator of change, but we recognise the fact that we can only do so much. Maybe Myanmar will change if we leave them alone. [...] If the country is not willing, then it is difficult. [...] I told Myanmar I don't mind continuing to do it but there must be something worthwhile for me to go. It's okay if on the first trip we don't achieve everything but if it is going to be worthwhile for me to go again, I must be allowed to interact with the relevant people."<sup>94</sup>

21 Apr 2006 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: "I was disappointed that [Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar] was not able to meet Aung San Suu Kyi. [...] There is a general feeling that the visit by the ASEAN representative to Myanmar should be seen as a part of the process of ASEAN involvement in the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar."<sup>95</sup>

26 Apr 2006 **SPDC threatened to dissolve the National League for Democracy, accusing it of having links to illegal organizations.**<sup>96</sup>



- 4 May 2006 Malaysia's FM Syed Hamid Albar: "Any action they [the SPDC] take, like closing down NLD, or not releasing Aung San Suu Kyi, these are all impediments and obstacles to creating visible signs of credibility in terms of the movement towards democracy."<sup>97</sup> "We want them to take actions, we would like to see the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and even though we do not want to interfere in their affairs, they are not helping us in creating that necessary confidence."<sup>98</sup>
- 4 May 2006 Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar: "ASEAN would need to explore ways and means to enhance cooperation with the UN, giving particular attention towards enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the world body to carry out its peacekeeping function, with a view to promoting peace and stability in the region."<sup>99</sup>
- "I think people are worried this is creating a mechanism for interference or intervention, whether in an inter-state or intra-state conflict. [...] We need to build confidence among ourselves that the military is not intended to, or will not be used as, an intervention mechanism. [...] I also cannot discount the concern of at least one ASEAN member which takes the view that regional peacekeeping may be used as a pretext for intervention. [...] Simply put, though ASEAN sees such a regional peacekeeping force as a long-term possibility, the present comfort level is insufficient to allow for member countries to undertake this initiative at this point in time."<sup>100</sup>
- 8 May 2006 Thai Senator Kraissak Choonhavan: "ASEAN has to come out with a resolution to have the question of Burma discussed and not protect the regime."<sup>101</sup>
- 9 May 2006 **SPDC failed to attend an inaugural gathering of Southeast Asian defence ministers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.**<sup>102</sup> Malaysian Defence Minister Najib Razak: "We invited Myanmar to attend this meeting. We were hoping that they would attend but they cited domestic commitments and for that reason they are not able to come."<sup>103</sup>
- 19 May 2006 Indonesian FM Hassan Wirajuda: "China, India and Korea should work closely with us to make sure that Myanmar changes itself to be more democratic. [...] We understand their economic interests, but at the same time they should not forget the need to help convince Myanmar to make progress."<sup>104</sup>



- 18-20 May 2006 **UN Under Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari visited Burma.**
- 22 May 2006 Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “We hope Myanmar will [...] work closely with the international community, including the UN and ASEAN, to make further progress. [...] In ASEAN we have taken a position that Aung San Suu Kyi should be released as soon as possible.”<sup>105</sup>
- 25 May 2006 Concerned over the deteriorating human rights and political situation in Myanmar, **the Indian Parliamentarians’ Forum for Democracy in Burma (IPFDB) issued a statement welcoming UN Security Council action.** Citing regional and domestic security concerns, the IPFDB also urged the Indian government to actively support democratization in Myanmar (see page 43 for full statement).
- 26 May 2006 Malaysia’s FM Syed Hamid Albar: “They [the SPDC] are able to maintain security. Why should they be worried? I don’t think Aung San Suu Kyi should be a cause for worry to them.”<sup>106</sup>
- 27 May 2006 **SPDC extends Aung San Suu Kyi’s detention for a year.**
- 27 May 2006 Malaysia’s FM Syed Hamid Albar: “I am very surprised. I was hoping [...] that they would not extend the house arrest. But that is their right. Of course, we are disappointed.”<sup>107</sup>
- 27 May 2006 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: “I’m disappointed. Clearly this was an opportunity for Myanmar to release her.”<sup>108</sup>
- 29 May 2006 Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon: “We are disappointed but we realise that the communication channels that we have with Myanmar are very, very important. [...] So although we do get disappointed but the communication line must continue to be used, and we hope to see concrete progress in national reconciliation and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.[...] We have been getting some positive signals from Myanmar and negative signals. So this process will continue [...] and hopefully we will hear good news soon.”<sup>109</sup>
- 2 Jun 2006 Indonesia FM Hassan Wirayuda asserted that serious human rights violations are an international issue, and called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi: “Obviously, no country can claim that gross human rights violations are its own internal affair [...] Such an excuse is hard to accept.”<sup>110</sup>



**Footnotes**

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## AIPMC MISSION STATEMENT

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) aims to achieve the following fundamental objectives as prerequisites towards restoring freedom and instituting democracy in Myanmar:

1. To urgently secure the unconditional release from detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and restore to her, all her civil and democratic rights; and to enable the participation of all sections of Myanmar's diverse society, including minority groups, in the democratic process.

2. To urgently secure the unconditional release of all political detainees including all Members of Parliament elected during the 1990 General Elections.

3. To urgently work towards convening the legitimately elected Parliament of Myanmar as a first step towards genuine democratic and constitutional reforms in Myanmar and concurrently, to require the restoration of legal and political authority to the elected Parliament.

4. To urgently secure the holding of a meaningful, representative and legitimate National Convention to lay the basis for democratisation and national reconciliation which should involve tripartite participation of the military junta, the National League for Democracy and the ethnic nationalities, as well as the full and free participation of all MPs elected at the 1990 General Elections, aimed to achieve the following objectives by July 2006:

- A new constitution for a democratic Myanmar
- Free and fair general elections for a new Parliament in a new Myanmar

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Cover photo from AIPMC visit to  
refugee camp on Thailand-Myanmar border, 2006



ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY MYANMAR CAUCUS

**[www.aseanmp.org](http://www.aseanmp.org)**

**[info@aseanmp.org](mailto:info@aseanmp.org)**