

Democratic Voice of Burma Political Prisoners News June - 2006

Confession of a warder of Burma's Tharawaddy Jail: Thwarting the ICRC and fleeing the inmates *May 29, 2006*

NLD youths remember a selfless colleague Hla Khin *May 31, 2006*

Burmese activist meets former Czech president *May 31, 2006*

Burmese lawyer Aye Myint's license withdrawn *Jun 05, 2006*

Breaking News : Su Su Nway released today *June 06, 2006*

Interview with Su Su Nway on her unexpected release *June, 06, 2006*

Student leader Ko Ko Gyi on Su Su Nway's release *Jun 06, 2006*

Student leader Min Ko Naing on Su Su Nway's release *Jun 06, 2006*

Interview with Su Su Nway on her release – Part 2 *Jun 07, 2006*

Dr. Tun Than in Bangkok to stage protest in Burma *Jun 07, 2006*

Burmese public excited by Su Su Nway's release *Jun 07, 2006*

Annan welcomes release of Su Su Nway *Jun 08, 2006*

Journalist Sein Win says the ban on him by Burma junta is not true, strictly speaking
Jun 08, 2006

Tun Than still tries to re-enter Burma despite 'nullified' passport *Jun 09, 2006*

U-Turn: Now, Burmese police chief says Suu Kyi is dangerous *Jun 09, 2006*

Bully: Another NLD member arrested at Yenangyaung in central Burma
Jun 10, 2006

Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly hospitalised *Jun 10, 2006*

Aung San Suu Kyi's health *Jun 11, 2006*

Burmese prisoner Than Win Hliang's condition deteriorates *Jun 13, 2006*

Two Burma Bogale farmers' appeal accepted by the High Court, at last *Jun 14, 2006*

Appeal submitted for solo protester Tun Lin Kyaw *Jun 15, 2006*

Exiled Burmese activists to mark Su Kyi's 61st birthday *Jun 15, 2006*

12 Nobel laureates demand Aung San Suu Kyi release *Jun 17, 2006*

ILO calls for an end to force labour in Burma *Jun 17, 2006*

Burma last King Thibaw's grandson is dead *Jun 18, 2006*

Burmese Diasporas around the world remember detained leader *Jun 18, 2006*

Guess who is going to be 61 today? *Jun 19, 2006*

An interview with Varclav Havel: A Rose for Aung San Suu Kyi *Jun 19, 2006*

Free the Lady: Call for Aung San Suu Kyi's release on her 61st birthday *Jun 19, 2006*

Solo protestor Salai Tun Than unable to return to Burma *Jun 19, 2006*

Burma's New Generation students' birthday messages *Jun 19, 2006*

Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday at NLD HQs in Rangoon *Jun 19, 2006*

Rangoon solo protestor missing *Jun 20, 2006*

Burmese activists continue to stage hunger strike outside White House *Jun 20, 2006*

Burma NLD starts petition to have leader, prisoners freed *Jun 21, 2006*

Solo protestor Tun Tun released *Jun 21, 2006*

Political prisoner Saw Win's condition continues to deteriorate *Jun 29, 2006*

The State will not feed prisoners anymore - Burmese prison staff *Jun 29, 2006*

Confession of a warder of Burma's Tharawaddy Jail: Thwarting the ICRC and fleecing the inmates

May 29, 2006

Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) suspended visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to prisons and labour camps across the country at the end of 2005, and it had not given any specific reasons for the termination of the visits, which had been going on since 1999. Here, a former warder at Tharawaddy Jail in lower central Burma who was transferred to a hard labour camp told DVB what happened:

"It was around August 2005. As the ICRC was about to enter the prison (check the condition of prisoners), around 10 divisional and township Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members came inside the prison first. They met the ICRC (staff) at the gate. Then they held discussion with the ICRC. The ICRC told them, you enter one day and we enter another. Or you go as a team and we go as a team. But the USDA didn't accept it. Whether you are going to enter or not, (they told the ICRC staff), as if they received order from the top or as if it was their duty, they entered the prison and told the assumed leader of the USDA prisoners; we need not depend on foreign forces, we can give you rights within the country. We will arrange correspondence for those who could not. We will look after those with poor health. You do not need to depend on foreign organisations like this. You have our organisation, he (USDA leader) told the prisoners on the first day."

Asked if the prisoners believed what the USDA leader said, the warder replied:

"They wanted to believe. It is a case of farting from the top of downward wind making the dog under the moon happy. As they wanted to believe, whether it was true or not, they wrote letters for prisoners who lost contacts with their homes, but they still have no contact. They still can't contact anyone from home. On the following day, the ICRC came according to their duties. But they could not enter. The ICRC had to leave the prison from the gate at 8pm on the following day. The ICRC didn't enter the prison."

When asked if the USDA members returned to the prison on the following days, he said:

"As we are civil servants, I will tell you honestly. But don't unearth (mention) my name. For the remaining days, he/they drank and ate at the main jail and gate and went home. Just for the expense of the drinking and eating, they collected 2000 Kyat from each cell, 38 cells from House 1, 4, 6, 8 and 9 to pay for it. They have the gut to eat and drink from those who are deprived, poor and in trouble."

Asked if the eating and drinking means the consumption of alcohol, he said:

"Of course, it is. The USDA members were divided into (two groups) with five in each. The big USDA animals on divisional and district level were given a banquet on the upper floor of (the resident) of the main jail governor. Township USDA members were

(entertained) inside the prison. They did that at the main jail with big table and fleeced the prisoners.”

[Top](#)

NLD youths remember a selfless colleague Hla Khin

May 31, 2006

The National League for Democracy (NLD) youth members and political activists held a memorial service on the 7th anniversary of the death of Rangoon Shwepyitha Township NLD youth leader Hla Khin who died in the notorious Insein Jail. The ceremony was held at Chaukhtatgyi Sasana Gonyi Buddhist Monastery and it was attended by NLD members, former political prisoners and student leaders including Min Ko Naing and pro-democracy activists.

Hla Khin was arrested and detained without any charges in 1998 during an upcountry tour of Aung San Suu Kyi, and he suffered severe depression after he endured inhumane tortures in the hand of the ousted Military Intelligence Service (MIS) agents and prison authorities.

“As he was unable to bear the pains of being detained without committing any crime, before he died at around 5pm, 30 May 1999, outside the iron bars (of the prison cell), he told us he was going to do something,” a fellow prisoner told DVB. “I will do something for you all. They might release you after I do something, but he didn’t say clearly what he was going to do. He only said he would something for the good of his comrades.”

Hla Khin committed suicide.

“It should have never happened in the first place,” an NLD member said. “We lost our rights as a prisoner (prisoners). We had no rights to demand. Medical treatment rights were none. He died unnecessarily. “

“After his death we received the rights to walk before showers,” said another NLD. “They (prison authorities) came to ask if our curry was good/delicious, if there was any oil in it, if it was good to eat. They themselves cooked ngapi (fish paste), fried chinpaung (rosella) leaves for us. They came to ask if we had enough medicines and all that. They released us after sending us to the police controlled labour camps for a month. He sacrificed his life for all and fought for our rights and our freedom.”

[Top](#)

Burmese activist meets former Czech president

May 31, 2006

Belgium-based Burmese pro-democracy activist Aung Maw Zin met with former Czech Republic president and Nobel laureate Vaclav Havel on 30 May, and urged him to bring the issue of Burma to the UN Security Council.

“I met with him (to discuss) the extension of the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to another year,” said Aung Maw Zin when asked what the response of Havel. “I gave him a statement issued by us and we talked about the UN Security Council. Based on this statement, (I told him that) the Burmese government is killing ethnic nationals, the Karen people, extended the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to another year without accepting the request of Kofi Annan for her release. Therefore, I pleaded with him (Havel) to (demand?) the UN Security council for an immediate action on Burma issue.

“As for him, as soon as he met with me, he expressed his sadness over the one-year extension of the detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and told me to tell her. He then told me that the international pressure is very important, that he understands it from his personal experiences and during the transition period in his country and that many leaders including the Dalai Lama is in Brussels. Therefore, he is meeting with them to look for the methods for a solution. He will think about it he said. More things needed to be done for the Burma issue, he told me.”

Aung Maw Zin also sued the French oil giant Total for human rights abuses caused by its activities in Burma.

[Top](#)

Burmese lawyer Aye Myint's license withdrawn

Jun 05, 2006

While the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is calling for the release of Burmese lawyer Aye Myint from Pegu, legal authorities in Burma recently withdrew his lawyer license and dismissed him as a member of the High Court lawyer association, the Bar Council.

A notification letter, dated 12th May informing his dismissal and the order for the return of the lawyer license, was sent to the family of Aye Myint.

Aye Myint's lawyer San Maung said that his client was dismissed from the Bar Council because he was found 'guilty' under several charges in the past.

In fact, Aye Myint was accused of giving 'wrong' information to the ILO but local residents told DVB that he was arrested and imprisoned for helping the farmers of Daik-U Township's Phaungdawthi Village report the confiscation of their pasturelands by military authorities.

San Maung pointed out that the dismissal of Aye Myint is unacceptable as the action is not in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Bar Council and he was given no chance to defend himself.

[Top](#)

Breaking News : Su Su Nway released today

'I took (my) prison uniform with me because I know that I will have to come back to prison until Burma gains democracy.' - Su Su Nway

June 06, 2006

Rangoon Kawmoo Township's Htan Manaing villager, Su Su Nway who had been detained for fighting against forced labour practices, is released today around 1:30 PM Burma's standard time.

'I am fine but I don't feel happy or sad about my release because forced labour in Burma still exists. I will continue fighting against forced labour and all kinds of human rights abuses', Su Su Nway told DVB during the interview after she was released.

'I thank everybody who morally and physically supported me including the ILO and all concerned persons around the world. I took (my) prison uniform with me because I know that I will have to come back to prison until Burma gains democracy', she added.

Su Su Nway is the first person ever in Burma to have successfully sued her local authority members over forced labour practices. But, as an act of revenge, she was subsequently counter-sued with trumped-up charges by the authorities, and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

The full interview with Su Su Nway will be aired in today's evening transmission.

[Top](#)

Interview with Su Su Nway on her unexpected release

June, 06, 2006

Rangoon Kawmoo Township's Htan Manaing villager, Su Su Nway who had been detained for fighting against forced labour practices, is released from the notorious Rangoon Insein Jail today around 1:30pm Burma's standard time. When DVB's Moe Aye asked how her health was, she said:

SSN: Yes, my health is good.

DVB: When were you released?

SSN: I have arrived (at the National League for Democracy (NLD) HQs in Rangoon) just now by car. They summoned and told me at 1.30pm that I was released.

DVB: How did they release you?

SSN: With (?Act) 401, unconditionally, including the remaining months, they told me. The prison governor told me himself.

DVB: Yes. How long were you in prison?

SSN: More than seven months. Seven months and 23 days.

DVB: Did you know in advance that you will be released from the jail?

SSN: No, I didn't. Last week when they (her relatives) came to see me at the prison, I told them that I will be in the prison for 18 months. Only ten more months remaining (for the release), I said. I will be released on 23 April (2007). As 23 is Thingyan

(Water Festival period), I would be released 12 days early. That's all I knew. I didn't have any hope that I will be released early. Now, when it struck one (1pm local time), a three star official (the main overseer of the prison) summoned me and told me that I was released. So, I asked him/her why I was released and how. I was told that I was released with 401, unconditionally, including the remaining months. Then, I was taken to the prison governor's office and they took pictures and the like while the governor was asking me questions. The governor gave a speech.

DVB: What did he say?

SSN: ...He said how the prison administrative department, when it comes to the state government, how well they look after inmates and the like...

DVB: Having said that they drove you away in a prison van?

SSN: No, it is not the prison van. They hired a taxi for 3000 (Kyat) and sent me here. They themselves hired it and sent me off.

DVB: Quite a lot of people, when they are released from prison, they go to their family. You didn't go (straight away) to your family but come to the NLD. Why?

SSN: As for my family, although my father and mother begot me, (and) after they were not there (dead), Su Su Nway (I) belong to them still. I am an NLD youth member. Only the NLD owns me. Therefore, I go to someone who owns me first. My brothers and sisters belong to me, but they do not own me.

DVB: Won't the other side (the authorities) bear bigger grudges against you; this girl we released her from the prison out of pity. As soon as she is released, she goes to the NLD. Do you consider this kind of grudge? How do you feel?

SSN: I have already said. 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. Even when they release me early, if they arrest me again, we will have to enter (prison) again. We have to resume our job. If I am afraid of being arrested, I would have never started to do this job from the beginning.

DVB: As you are released months before (your release date), aren't you feeling happy or how do you feel?

SSN: I feel nothing (special). Then, it was them who summoned me here (to the prison). When it comes to the time of release, they are the people who released me. The car driver asked my why they release you before you served your terms. I told him that it was them who summoned me here and when it comes to the time for release, it is they who did it. What can I say, I said to him.

DVB: What I mean is, you do not feel sad or happy that you are released from prison?

SSN: Yes. Nothing...For Burma to obtain democracy, I really want Aunty Suu (Aung San Suu Kyi) who is the great, the most hardworking person and the main

dependable person, to be released. I am not happy that I am released. The main thing is, only when Auntie Suu is free, I will be happy.

DVB: During your time inside the prison, did you face the worst situation as a person whose health is not good?

SNN: On the Independence Day (4 January 2006), I lost consciousness and feel down. It lasted about half an hour.

DVB: I don't know whether you realised it or not. When you were released, the ILO (International Labour Organisation) was holding meetings at Geneva in Switzerland. You could say that you were released because of the ILO's pressure. But although you were released, forced labour still exists (in Burma). People such as lawyer U Aye Myint who were arrested in connection with forced labour are still remaining (inside prisons). What do you want to comment on that now that you are released.

SSN: Not only those who are fighting against forced labour, all political prisoners, political prisoners who are put inside isolated cells, I want them all to be released as soon as possible. As I saw all their living conditions, I want them all to be free like me.

DVB: Yes. Now that you are released, how could forced labour be wiped out; how do you believe in your heart?

SSN: As for me, I don't trust them (the military authorities) very much.

DVB: Why?

SSN: The reason is what they say and what they do are very polarised.

DVB: Now that you are going back to your village, how would you feel if you see the authorities who sent you jail unfairly, face to face?

SSN: How shall I say, they have to do what the state, the authorities from above tell them. Therefore, I can understand and forgive (them).



Student leader Ko Ko Gyi on Su Su Nway's release

Jun 06, 2006

“As she was released thus unexpectedly, we are welcoming her with joy. We also respect and honour her success. What I want to say mainly is forced labour is widespread in our country with several forms.

“For this, an ordinary villager, a tender girl, confronted this for justice. As it was evidently clear that it was unfair forced labour, the local authorities concerned took action (taken action against?). This is the victory for Ma Su Su Nway from the side of justice. When confronting injustice, it is not only well-known people who could do things. It is the best example that an ordinary person could achieve things. Therefore, as it was clear that it was forced labour, the local authorities concerned were punished (and) that was Ma Su Su Nway's first victory. As they were feeling aggrieved by this, the local authorities tried to take action against this tender woman by accusing her of intimidating/threatening the

local authority members, men who wear 20 foot long (sarong)! Therefore, Ma Su Su Nway was punished and imprisoned.

“Although Ma Su Su Nway was imprisoned, as her spirit stands on the side of justice, her spirit was recognised and honoured by not only all the people of our nation but also the international human community. Although she was imprisoned, this is Ma Su Su Nway’s second victory. Then again, her release before the releasing date due to the international pressure and demand is Ma Su Su Nway’s third victory. In fact, Ma Su Su Nway is a girl who wins, wins, wins with successive victories. She is the best lesson, the example, for all ordinary citizens who stand on the side of injustice. Therefore, we are happy like brothers do for their little sister who escaped from the small cell of atrocity, and on the other hand, we come to welcome and honour a young girl who is brave and resolute despite her tender age.”

[Top](#)

Student leader Min Ko Naing on Su Su Nway’s release

Jun 06, 2006

“We ourselves accompanied her onto the prison van. No brothers, no sisters would like to accompany their little sister to the prison van for her to dwell in the prison palace.

“But when we confront injustice, we will need to display our courage to face anything. Therefore, we accompanied her ourselves with joined hands to the prison van. We accompanied her thus knowing that she will be sentenced unfairly at the court in the end. Therefore, we ourselves have to welcome her ourselves today. Therefore, I told her; my little sister, justice will prevail in the end. For us, there is no surprise. The reason is – we all noticed that everyone who confronted (fight) for justice will reap good benefits eventually.

“When the lady judge read out the guilty sentence, she (Su Su Nway) showed no emotion. It was as if she came to hear an answer she had already known. She is someone who decided to face anything. Therefore, she herself invited us to come and listen on the last day of the trial at the court, as the way that pleased her. When we told her that our presence will burden her and advised her to think about it, she said let it be a burden as much as you like. I will be very satisfied if you are seen standing by my side while listening to the last sentence. As she told us to oblige her thus, we had to stand by her side. Therefore, she showed no particular sadness but walked onto the prison van.

“When she returns now, it is not in a form of her obtaining an opportunity. She is calm, as if she is a little sister who had carried out her duties faithfully and returned home. I like this kind of calmness/serenity. Calmness and maturity are very important for fight (for democracy) in the long run. We are very encouraged to see clearly Ma Su Su Nway’s courage and her calmness and depth when she faces (problems).”

[Top](#)

Interview with Su Su Nway on her release – Part 2

Jun 07, 2006

What was your greatest concern when you were inside prison?

“My greatest worry in prison was, during my absence (from the village) – for those who bravely stood witness for the truth, (and) for me under (the power) of the (village authority) chairmen. While I was inside the prison, I was always feeling concerned for those villagers of mine who stood for the truth; I was always worried that they might be oppressed and treated unfairly after I was gone.”

Did you face any kind of underhanded actions against you by the prison authorities?

“My hot water bottle for taking medicine was spiked with mothball. My dried fish box was spiked with crushed mothball. Inside the prison, there were some incidents of big criminals and prison staff being in cahoots. It could be that they conspired together (spiked me) thus because they are afraid that I might tell other people about their shady business activities.

What kind of lesson did you learn (did you take away) from your time in prison?

“I said that while I was inside the prison. When I am out, I will take away with me the ‘white’ (convict/prison uniform). Prison is the place I have to return. As long as we do not get democracy, we will have to return to prison. Therefore, I said that I will take away the ‘white’ with me. I did as I said. As long as there is no democracy, we students and youths and NLD members will always have to go to the prison. Depending on their (military leaders) needs, they will release us when they need to or if they don’t have to, they will re-arrest us. Knowing that, I kept my prison uniform with me.”

The future?

“My campaign (against) forced labour is not over yet. As we haven’t finished our job, we have to continue to do that. I want to tell all the people of the country who are all being oppressed and persecuted in many ways. Prison is not a thing (place) to be afraid of. We are fighting for our rights. I want to tell you to solve your problems at the court and if you lose, let yourselves be imprisoned and unearth the truth.”

[Top](#)

Dr. Tun Than in Bangkok to stage protest in Burma

Jun 07, 2006

Former professor Dr. Salai Tun Than who has been preparing to re-enter Burma and stage a peaceful protest for the 61st birthday of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon, has arrived in Bangkok today from another Asian country as part of his campaign trail for democracy in Burma.

He called on the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) chairman ‘Senior General’ Than Shwe personally and addressed to him by name, for democratic reforms in Burma. Tun Than insisted that he is not playing the part of a hero

to popularise himself, but staging a protest at Rangoon airport on 19 June for Burma and its people.

“I call Than Shwe, my younger brother. My younger brother, you can change now even if you didn’t do that before. There is an English proverb; compared to never changing, changing late is better (better late than never?). As a big brother, I am always welcoming it. Join the people. Pity the people. Be considerate to their predicament. That is what I want to say. If you can’t be considerate, if you think of your power only, you, my younger brother can come to the plane with which I am arriving (at Rangoon Mingaladon Airport) and shoot me yourself. But if you are continuing to be wicked, the people will punish you. Things you never expect will occur. Look at (what happened to) U Ne Win (the late dictator). Only you can dismantle his legacy. That is what I want to say to Senior General Than Shwe,” said Tun Than.

He also pleaded civilians, civil servants and armed forces members as follows:

“I want say to the people (of Burma). If you are afraid, you will never save yourselves. You must dare to carry out the campaign not to go outside your house (on every Saturday). I am someone who will risk his life by going out. I particularly want to say to civil servants who are running the SPDC (the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council) administration mechanism. The government mechanism will stop if there is non-cooperation and if you don’t get involved with them. Breed the blood of courage. Secondly, I want to talk to armed forces. Armed forces in the Philippines and Indonesia stood firmly on the side of the oppressed people, not on the side of the dictator. Our armed forces, stand on the side of the people! The public is still keeping hope in you. (But if you say) No, I won’t stop, I will stay on the side of the people, don’t kill the public. Just kill the old grandfather (me).

“They have been accusing me of wanting to be a hero, wanting to be famous. I have a plan. I take risk. Take these and you people come forward and do it. I will follow you from behind. That is what I say. But I always invite people to come and take my place. I am doing thus because there is no one (to do what I am doing).

He also urged all religious leaders thus:

“Including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu Muslim leaders, please jointly beseech the government. The public is suffering. You must say to the government whether they are not going to sympathise with the people, not pity them or not. Beseech them thus. I want to say to the reverend (Buddhist) monks. If your holinesses are silent, we, the acolytes will suffer. If your holinesses cough a little and the truth comes out, we, the acolytes will feel a little bit better. Your humble acolyte came with the vow to sacrifice his life. As for your holiness, please don’t just watch other people who are in complete trouble. Please help those who are in trouble as much as possible. May I make a plea to you to beseech the government.

I also want to make a plea to educated people/intellectuals and experts. If you could still stand up, if you could still walk, come and join this old grandfather to protest. Young people laid down the strong foundation (of democracy & freedom?) with their blood and bones in the past. In order to build the building, let us build it with our elders' blood and bones. That is what I want to say.”

[Top](#)

Burmese public excited by Su Su Nway's release

Jun 07, 2006

The people of Burma are excited by the unexpected release of Su Su Nway, the villager of Htan Manaing, Rangoon Kawmoo Township, who successfully sued her local authorities over forced labour practices and in turn, countersued with trumped up charges and imprisoned more than seven months ago.

The release of Su Su Nway who was freed from Rangoon Insein jail on 7 June, sparked off series of excited talks at markets and teashops among both the young and the old in Burma.

“We are very happy about the release of Su Su Nway. We welcome the authority organisations concerned for her release,” said a Rangoon resident. “The reason is – she is a girl who has nothing to do with the crime but punished, and it is not good when it comes to the international community and the country's organisations”.

People are very happy when they heard that Su Su Nway was released,” said another resident. “When we listened to the media (radio), they also accept that term used by the media (calling her) the second Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Although people have never seen this little girl, they know that she has strong belief, political standing and practical actions. People not only love her, they also ‘think big’ (think highly) of her after they heard what she had to say to them. They praised her for her right belief, standing, attitude. First people thought that she was an illiterate country girl. Now they are thinking very highly of her. Her words are clear and easy, and she speaks simply, clearly and strongly without big political terms. As for us, she faces the reality and we have more trust in her.”

At the same time, the people in other areas of Burma are also said to be very excited by her release.

[Top](#)

Annan welcomes release of Su Su Nway

Jun 08, 2006

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan today warmly welcomed the release of rights activist, Su Su Nway from Htan Manaing Village in Rangoon Kawmoo Township who was imprisoned last year after she sued village officials for imposing forced labour.

He also called for the immediate release of all more than 1000 political prisoners including democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, echoing remarks from the UN envoy to Burma who said the release of Su Su Nway was not enough and all activists should be released.

“The secretary general urges the Myanmar (Burmese) authorities to follow up this measure with further action that will alleviate the political atmosphere and promote national reconciliation, including the lifting of remaining restrictions on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders,” UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

Similarly, the UN special human rights envoy to Burma Paulo Sergio Pinheiro also welcomed the release of Su Su Nway in a statement issued yesterday. The report which was issued in Geneva praised Su Su Nway as a heroine who fights against forced labour practices with her head unbowed. Moreover, it said that her release strengthens the efforts of UN under-secretary general for political affairs Ibrahim Gambari for national reconciliation and democratic transition in Burma.

Su Su Nway, a 33-year-old member democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) was released at 1:30 pm Burmese standard time Tuesday from the notorious Rangoon Insein Prison. She was arrested in October 2005, after she reported cases of forced labour to the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO) and then sued village officials over the practice. She was jailed for 18 months at Rangoon’s Insein Prison for allegedly ‘swearing at and threatening’ officials.

The country’s Supreme (High) Court had refused to take up her case.

[Top](#)

Journalist Sein Win says the ban on him by Burma junta is not true, strictly speaking

Jun 08, 2006

Some news agency reports and international news said that Burma’s military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has banned domestic publications from printing articles by a veteran journalist Ludhu Sein Win who wrote an article about Burma in the International Herald Tribune recently.

But Sein Win told DVB that its is not true that he was banned, but only ‘suspended’.

“It is not true. My articles were printed in the whole previous week. I didn’t say anything. On this Monday, my articles were not included in the weeklies and the like. The reason is they were suspended. The Press Scrutiny Board (PSB) didn’t ban drafts of my works. They said they are suspending them because they haven’t received a policy/ response from the top. I am continuing to submit drafts of my works. It is not a ban, I don’t think there is a reason for the ban, I think. I didn’t write anything that hurts anyone. The people at the PSB might be afraid. They are suspending them because they haven’t received a response from above. I don’t blame them for being afraid. For them, if they make a mistake, their ‘rice pot will be broken’. As for us, nothing will happen if an

article of mine got rejected. Previously, not a small number of (army) majors (PSB officials) lost their jobs, did they? I do not find fault with people from the PSB for banning or suspending me. The main thing is the system.”

DVB: They didn't say how long the suspension would be?

“No, they didn't. They will be submitting it every week, they said. I might get it (the permission) this week. Just continue to submit all the drafts of my works, they said.”

DVB: You mean you will continue to write?

“As for me, I will continue to write. They might be included next week, on Monday.”

DVB: What you mean is you believe that there is no reason to ban your works?

“As for me, I believe that I believe that there is no reason for the ban. The article I wrote in the IHT (International Herald Tribune) didn't include words that strongly lash out at the government. If I have to say about this article, I wrote it as a newspaperman. It will include things the government doesn't like and things the NLD doesn't like.”

DVB: A newspaperman has to write and say what should be written and spoken...

“Yes. As a newspaperman I have to write what should be written. I can't just look at anyone's face (partial). Here, some people don't like this.”

DVB: Whatever is said, you are continuing to write and submit them?

“I will continue to write and submit them.”

DVB: If the suspended period drags on, how will you feel?

“Only then would I assume that there is a ban on me.”

DVB: Then what would you feel?

“As for me, there is a saying of Sayagyi (Great Teacher) Thakhin Kodaw Maing (famous Burmese nationalist and peace advocate); in order to have a mouthful of rice (survive), I can be a firewood chopper. If I chopped firewood, I could afford to eat rice (survive).

65-year-old Ludhu Sein Win was writing for a dozen publications in Burma and helped found the opposition National League of Democracy (NLD) with Aung San Suu Kyi. The NLD, which won elections in 1990 but was never allowed to take office.

He began his career as a reporter at the left-wing Ludu newspaper, but former dictator General Ne Win shut down the publication in 1967 and Sein Win was sentenced to 13 years in prison and has been under military surveillance since his release in 1980.

He is also known to be a keen football (soccer) fan and pundit who rightly predicted that Greece would win the Euro 2004 tournament. He joking told DVB that Brazil would win this world cup, England will win a Thai kick-boxing tournament and the German will win the referee competition.

[Top](#)

Tun Than still tries to re-enter Burma despite 'nullified' passport

Jun 09, 2006

Although the Burmese authority declared his passport null and void on Wednesday, Salai Tun Than, a retired Burmese professor today said that he will still try to re-enter Burma by other means.

“I can’t say out of the blue as to what I am going to do next, but I am trying to enter the country, nevertheless,” said Tun Than, who is now in Thailand and planning to go back to Burma and carry out a solitary peaceful demonstration against the military government on June 19 which marks Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday. “They (the military rulers) are keeping the power of the nation by unfair means. I am going to ask them to return it (to the rightful owners, the people). As they have nullified it (his passport), I want to ask them if they have the rights to do so.”

No, said the secretary of exiled Burma Lawyers Council (BLC), Htay Aung.

“There is an existing law concerning the passport. It is called the Burma Passport Act. There is no clause that says that a passport could be nullified or declared void,” insisted Htay Aung. “Dr. Salai Tun Than left the country and went abroad legally. If they didn’t want to issue the passport to Dr. Salai Tun Than according to the law, they shouldn’t have done it there and then. According to the existing laws, there is no clause that says that a government could declare a citizen’s passport null and void. I want to say that the withdrawal of Dr. Tun Than’s passport by the government is illegal.”

[Top](#)

U-Turn: Now, Burmese police chief says Suu Kyi is dangerous

Jun 09, 2006

Burmese police chief Maj-Gen Khin Yi said that the recent extension of the house arrest of Burma’s democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi for another year is due to the fact that she poses a threat to the security of the nation, according reports from Karen State capital Pa-an in eastern Burma.

His latest comment followed his rather confident assessment in May at Kuala Lumpur that support for the detained leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Nobel laureate, has faded and dwindled so much over the years that her release from house arrest is unlikely to pose a threat to political stability as she was unlikely to be able to draw large gatherings.

“Some members of the NLD have resigned so I don’t think she has a lot of support,” Khin Yi told reporters. The security situation in the country “is very good. Our police force can handle everything. There is peace and tranquility in Myanmar (Burma),” he said.

The ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Information Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw San (Hsan) also lashed out at the US for trying to persuade the UN Security Council to take action on Burma. Kyaw San insisted the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi is only a domestic issue and that it will not threaten the security of the wider world.

Aung San Suu Kyi has spent about 10 of the last 17 years in detention, mostly under house arrest. Her latest detention was last extended on 27 May for another year prompting condemnations from pro-democracy supporters. She was rearrested and detained on 30 May 2003 when her supporters were brutally attacked and killed by the junta-sponsored thugs in an ambush at Dipeyin in upper Burma.

At present, she is in virtual solitary confinement at her residence in Rangoon, allowed no outside visitors except occasional checks by her personal physician, and no telephone contact.

The junta recently allowed a meeting between her and a top visiting U.N. official, Ibrahim Gambari, for about 45 minutes giving a glimpse of hope to the people of Burma which was snuffed out a couple of days later when the detention was extended. He was the first foreign official allowed to see her in more than two years.

[Top](#)

Bully: Another NLD member arrested at Yenangyaung in central Burma

Jun 10, 2006

A member of National League for Democracy (NLD), Win Naing who resided at Baymet Ward, Yenangyaung, Magwe Division in central Burma, was arrested yesterday evening by police officers from nearby Letpankone Police Station.

He was arrested not because he committed a crime but just that a local authority member didn't like the look of him and told the police to arrest him, a township NLD organising committee member Tint Lwin told DVB.

“When (NLD) township organising committee member Than Aung went to ask why he was arrested, he was told that the ward authority chairman Aung Win didn't like the look of him and ordered his arrest. When he went to enquire at the police station, a policeman on duty said that he (Win Naing) is to be taken action against under Act-47. Act-47 is the act with which they arrest drunken louts when they are out of control in the ward. In fact, the one who was drunk (at the time) was ward authority chairman Aung Win. He ordered his arrest while drunk.”

When DVB contacted the police station, an officer on duty confirmed the report as follows:

“Yes. The ward authority reported. We are detaining (him) temporarily. He hasn't been charged with anything yet. It is a temporary detention because the ward authority reported.”

Aung Win is known to be running an illegal gambling centre and has been extorting money from local residents. When Win Naing could not provide the full amount of money he demanded, Aung Win torn up the money Win Naing could give him and ordered his arrest, according to Tint Lwin.

The trial of Win Naing starts this coming Monday.v

[Top](#)

Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly hospitalised

Jun 10, 2006

Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) expressed its concern over reports of the hospitalisation of its detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

There have been some reports since yesterday morning that Aung San Suu Kyi has been suffering from a severe bout of diarrhoea and that she was in a serious state.

The NLD members and some very concerned people tried to ring her family doctors Tin Myo Win and Pyone Mo Ei to find out her real situation but they were unable to speak to them, making them feel more worried for her, NLD news and information spokesman Myint Thein told DVB.

“There have been reports from outside (abroad) that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is not well and that she is seriously ill. By the ‘outside’ I mean people are asking us (about it) from abroad. We are investigating as much as we could reach. We are trying to get in touch with (her) family doctor Dr. Tin Myo Win, but we still could not get hold of him. Whatever it is, we assume that something extraordinary is happening when we heard these reports. Therefore we are very anxious, especially there are only three women in the compound. There are only three women including our Elder Sister (Aung San Suu Kyi). Moreover, the health condition of Daw Khin Win, an organising member of Pegu Division who is looking after her is not good. She is over 60 years old. We are also very concerned for the condition of Daw Khin Win. Therefore, the authorities concerned should arrange such a way that when the family doctor could move in and out (of Aung San Suu Kyi's home in Rangoon's University Avenue), we want to demand thus.”

Similarly, the U.S. government said it's concerned about reports of her taken to hospital and reiterated a call for her release from detention. “We are, of course, very concerned by these reports,” said Sean McCormack, U.S. State Department spokesman. “We would call upon the Burmese government to provide Aung San Suu Kyi any and all medical assistance that she might need. And to ensure her safety during any treatment.”

[Top](#)

Aung San Suu Kyi's health

Jun 11, 2006

Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) police chief Maj-Gen Khin Yi confirmed today that detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi was treated for acute diarrhoea this week.

“She is at her house now. She was suffering from diarrhoea,” Khin Yi told reporters while travelling in eastern Karen State.

Reports have been emerging since Friday noon that the Nobel laureate was suffering from acute diarrhoea and hospitalised, but her National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders refused to confirm the reports, only saying that they were still enquiring about it.

Reports of her illness had earlier prompted the US State Department to say it was “very concerned” and called on the country’s military rulers to ensure she received prompt treatment, and the news spread worldwide. Khin Yi inevitably had to confirm the reports due to the US action.

DVB contacted her family doctors Tin Myo Win and Pyone Mo Ei by phone, but unable to get hold of them. A spokesman of the NLD, Myint Thein also told DVB that there had been difficulties in contacting Aung San Suu Kyi and her family doctor directly. Her doctor, Tin Myo Win, could not be reached for comment, but some reports suggest he might be caring for her inside the lakeside home where she is confined under house arrest.

“Therefore, we are still unable to confirm this matter. But according to the reports today, police chief Khin Yi admitted that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s not well,” said Myint Thein. “Another thing, we received a report from another source that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was hospitalised, is not true. Therefore, there is nothing for us to worry about. And we heard that (she) has the contact with the doctor. One thing, as I said before, there is (we have) no direct contact with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Therefore, the contacts are only through authority organisations concerned and her family doctor, Dr. Tin Myo Win. But there might be some rules Dr. Tin Myo Win has to observe. Therefore, when it comes to this kind of crucial matter, I hope that it would be more suitable if the authorities concerned told the concise, true and full story. We also demand this.

Other NLD leaders, members and renowned students including Min Ko Naing also expressed their concerns at the reports.

Defying international demands for her freedom, the SPDC leaders in late May extended Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest for another year. The 60-year-old opposition leader has been detained at her residence in Rangoon following a May 2003 attack on her convoy by junta-backed militia in the country’s central region. She has spent more than 10 of the last 17 years under house arrest. She was last month allowed by the junta to meet with UN Under Secretary General Ibrahim Gambari who said that Aung San Suu Kyi’s health was good, but reported that she would like visits by her doctors “to be more predictable and regular”.

[Top](#)

Burmese prisoner Than Win Hlaing’s condition deteriorates

Jun 13, 2006

The health condition of Than Win Hlaing who is being detained at the notorious Tharawaddy Jail is said to be deteriorating, suffering high blood pressure and liver complaints.

Than Win Hlaing was arrested and detained for writing a biography of Burma’s national hero and the father of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, General Aung San.

“His health condition is not good,” said a family member of Than Win Hlaing who went to see him at the prison on 9 June. “His face looked pale and his flesh was swollen like a TB sufferer. There are a lot of TB sufferers inside (the jail).

The health conditions of prisoners started to deteriorate at the end of 2005 after the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) staff were barred from seeing the inmates by means of harassment and underhanded restriction.

[Top](#)

Two Burma Bogale farmers’ appeal accepted by the High Court, at last

Jun 14, 2006

An appeal lodged on behalf of two farmers from Bogale Township in Burma’s delta region Irrawaddy Division, was accepted by the High Court in Rangoon on 10 June.

Schoolteacher and farmer Aye Min and a member of the state-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) Win Nyunt, both from Kyisuu-Kyonphar Village, are currently languishing in nearby Pyapon Jail serving a two year’s term, for reporting extortions and other corrupt practices carried out by their village authority members.

They have been detained since 9 December last year when they were arrested. Appeals for their release were submitted to courts at township, district and divisional levels, but all were rejected, their lawyer Aung Thein told DVB. But he added that the trial or hearing is not likely to start until the middle of the coming month.

The imprisonments of farmers who defy the authorities thus by reporting their corrupt practices, is against the existing law and a bullying tactic to prevent farmers from speaking the truth, Aung Thein said

[Top](#)

Appeal submitted for solo protester Tun Lin Kyaw

Jun 15, 2006

An appeal was lodged yesterday at the Burmese High Court in Rangoon on behalf of Tun Lin Kyaw who was sentenced to seven years in jail for staging a solo protest outside the Rangoon City Hall.

Tun Lin Kyaw’s lawyer Myint Thein told DVB that the imposition of a seven years jail term on someone who only staged a solo protest is against the law.

“(Tun Lin Kyaw) was sentenced to seven years in jail under the 1950 Emergency Provision Act 5-J. (He) should have legal entitlements... The seven years sentence is not in accordance with the law. Therefore, we had to put forward this point.”

Tun Lin Kyaw was arrested in 2004 and sentenced to seven years in jail for demanding the release of all political prisoners including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

[Top](#)

Exiled Burmese activists to mark Su Kyi's 61st birthday

Jun 15, 2006

Exiled Burmese political activists throughout the world are planning to celebrate the 61st birthday of Burma's detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which falls on 19 June.

Burmese Democracy Movement Association – UK members and supporters are marking the birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi at St. Matthias Church Hall in north London's Colindale on 17 June.

“There, we will try to make the international community aware of the restrictions on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and damages done to the nation (by Burma's military government),” said Dr. Win Naing of National League for Democracy – Liberated Areas (NLD-LA). “Then, Buddhist, Christian and Mohamedan religious leaders will hold a prayer meeting. At 12.30pm, pro-democracy activists, Friends of Burma foreigners will hold a demonstration for an hour outside the Burmese embassy in London. Then, on the 19th, there will be a prayer offering for the freedom of the people (of Burma) at Sasana Ramsi Monastery led by Abbot Reverend U Uttara.”

[Top](#)

12 Nobel laureates demand Aung San Suu Kyi release

Jun 17, 2006

While Burmese pro-democracy activists and their friends throughout the world are celebrating and praying for detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's 61st birthday, 12 Nobel laureates called on the ruling military junta to release her and hold free and fair elections.

The call was made at the South Korean city of Gwangju where Nobel Peace Prize winners met this week in South Korea to discuss prospects for global peace.

“We, the Nobel Peace Laureates ... believe that the political and physical freedom of our colleague Madame Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma must be guaranteed,” the laureates said in a special statement of solidarity issued at their annual meeting.

The laureates - including former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev - also expressed their support for Suu Kyi who is struggling to bring democracy to her Burma.

[Top](#)

ILO calls for an end to force labour in Burma

Jun 17, 2006

Recent International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference has called on Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) the release of all those who have been detained in Burma for reporting forced labour practices including lawyer Aye Myint.

The ILO has also condemned the widespread use of forced labour in Burma, and is demanding that the country's military rulers stop the practice or face sanctions.

The ILO meeting has adopted resolutions and issued warnings in the past. But, this is the first time the organization has set deadlines for Burma to meet specific demands, or face consequences, including taking the issue to the International Court of Justice.

[Top](#)

Burma last King Thibaw's grandson is dead

Jun 18, 2006

One of the grandchildren of Burma's famous last King Thibaw, Tawphayarlay U Aung Zeya (a.k.a.) Thant Zin (Tsin), passed away today at 8 a.m. Burma's standard time in Rangoon Japan General Hospital at the age of 80.

"My father's lung was not good from the start. It stressed the heart out and punctured its..., I was told. He was hospitalised for 12 days. Yes, we have the plan to inter him at (Rangoon) Hteinpin (Cemetery) at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 20th (of June)," Tawphayarlay's daughter Devi Thant Zin told DVB.

Tawphayarlay opposed successive military rules and as the results, he was detained from 1968 to 1970 for the first time, and from 1989 to 1992 for the second time. Moreover, before 1968, he was an underground activist and he became the patron of Ma-Na-Ta, the National Political Front in 1988. He was also involved in the Burmese nationalist and poet Sayargyi Thakhin Kodawmaing's domestic peace movement, Afro-Asian unity movement and the fight against the Chinese nationalists who invaded Burma in 1950s.

Devi Thant Zin told DVB that Tawphayarlay is the fourth son of the forth daughter of King Thibaw and his main wife, Queen Supayalat.

"He is the son of Ashin (Lady) Hteit-Suu Myatphayarkalay. I am his daughter, the only daughter, mark you. I am his daughter Devi Thant Zin. I have his grandchildren, four sons. Four grandchildren of his, survived. Our situation is like this. Our father's desire is this: he has the desire for domestic peace of Sayargyi Thakhin Kodawmaing, with no pain for anyone. That was his last desire. We are feeling bad about this.

Tawphayarlay U Aung Zeya Thant Zin is survived by his wife Khin May, thier daughter Devi Thant Zin and four grandchildren.

May he rest in peace!

[Top](#)

Burmese Diasporas around the world remember detained leader

Jun 18, 2006

Pro-democracy Burmese activists and their friends throughout the world marked the 61st birthday of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi with celebrations and prayer meetings.

Although her birthday falls on 19 June, the activists celebrated it a day or two early during the weekend for convenience. The celebrations were held at Auckland, New Zealand to the east and San Francisco, to the west.

At London, around 100 people turned up at St. Matthias Church Hall in Colindale where Buddhist, Christian and Muslim prayers were offered for the birthday girl, before the festive activities started. But sadly, not many Burmese turned up to the event for fear of being persecuted by the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) agents, as some of them are still holding Burmese passports and have some dealings with the junta officials.

At Auckland, the celebrants observed a 61 minutes silence in honour of the detained leader who sacrificed her life including her family life for her country. At the neighbouring country, activists held a birthday party for her in Sydney, which was organised by the Joint Action Committee for a Democratic Burma (JACDB).

Similarly, Burmese exiles in Norway and their friends celebrated her birthday at Sorensen where there is a Burmese Buddhist monastery and offered prayer for her.

In the United States, activists in San Francisco and Fort Wayne marked her birthday with ceremonies and political talks & discussions.

Not to be outdone, activists in Japan and Korea also held all day religious vigils today to mark her birthday which were supported by local residents and politicians. Malaysian branch of NLD – Liberated Area jointly organised a celebration with Labour Store Center (LSC) in Kuala Lumpur which was attended by Burmese nationals from all walks of life including ethnic nationals, according to NLD-LA chair Hla Min. No arrests were made by the local police.

At the same time, India's Gandhi family members also sent their birthday wishes to her through DVB.

Another birthday party for her is to be held in Bangkok by Forum Asia tomorrow.

[Top](#)

Guess who is going to be 61 today?

Happy Birthday dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi!

Free the Lady: Call for Aung San Suu Kyi's release on her 61st birthday

Jun 19, 2006

London-based Amnesty International (AI), members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), renowned 88 Generation student leaders including Min Ko Naing and pro-democracy Burmese activists, today unanimously called on Burma's military junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi.

The call was made on the Nobel laureate's 61st birthday, highlighting the unfair detention imposed on her at her lakeside home in Rangoon. AI insisted that it is improper to continue to detain Aung San Suu Kyi and that she should be released. Moreover, the

ruling military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) should keep its promise and release her immediately as a way of showing of its desire to carry out democratic reforms, AI added.

Similarly, top NLD leaders, Central NLD Women and Youth members, 88 Generation students, NLD members from all over Burma and other political organisations stated in their birthday messages that in order to solve the political problems of Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi should be released immediately.

Meanwhile, a report by Reuters from Rangoon said that a lone male protester shouted “Long Live Daw Aung San Suu Kyi” outside Rangoon City Hall for several minutes before police bundled him away, quoting witnesses.

Over the weekend and today, rallies were held in more than 25 countries to demand the freedom of the Nobel Peace Laureate, who has spent 10 of the past 17 years in detention.

Armed security men manned barricades and stopped traffic from passing in to prevent supporters of “The Lady” from gathering near her home.

[Top](#)

An interview with Varclav Havel: A Rose for Aung San Suu Kyi

Jun 19, 2006

The interview with former Czech president Vaclav Havel was conducted at Prague on Thursday 1 June, 2006

DVB: Yesterday at a conference in Brussels you carried a picture of Aung San Suu Kyi all day. It's not the first time you've done something like that. It seems to me that you've had a close relationship with Ms Suu Kyi for a long time, even though you have never met. Why is that?

VH: In Brussels I met a small delegation of Burmese who were carrying her picture, and because I liked the idea I took one myself and carried it too. I once proposed Ms Suu Kyi for the Nobel Peace Prize, and that year she actually received it. I'm fascinated and attracted by her fate, because she fights for freedom and democracy against the junta using peaceful and legal means – she has after all won elections in her time – but also because she's a fragile woman with a difficult fate which she has borne bravely for many years now. It's an unusual, unique life story to win elections, be cheated out of that victory and then locked up for ten years. And house arrest is no fun by any means. Even though I have never met her personally, I believe that she is a charismatic person and I firmly believe that everything will work out in the end.

DVB: Many people today say that Aung San Suu Kyi is not a political force for the future because she has become isolated under house arrest and her party has been decimated. They claim that for the future of Burma it'd be better to find some pragmatic elements within the regime and negotiate with them. You yourself were once in a similar

position – you stood with a small group of people against a strong regime. How would you respond to such a claim?

VH: The propaganda of totalitarian and authoritarian systems takes many forms. One of them is to try to render insignificant, both professionally and as citizens, those who take a critical stand against the regime, those who engage in the opposition. I remember that very well. For decades they wrote that I was a naïve author and a no-hoper, that I couldn't actually write, that I was waging a naïve and stupid battle, that I was out of touch with everyday life, that nobody was behind me, that nobody had any sympathy for me, that I was a forgotten wretch. I know that well. What's fascinating is the similarity, the fact it's the same everywhere.

I think Ms Suu Kyi should take it – and I believe she does – with some reserve and with a smile. The Burmese people themselves will decide, whether they like her or not, if her fight has been successful or not. There is no reason to be disquieted by such propaganda. What's important is to stand up for your beliefs, to insist on that and to be open to the world, not to get caught up in stubbornness, obsessions, hatred – and I think there is very little chance of that.

DVB: Being active in public life and in politics is always connected with certain self-denial. I can imagine that both you and Aung San Suu Kyi have often asked yourselves if there is any point in carrying on. What can one say to oneself when faced with the question, should I fight on?

VH: I once wrote an article which was called Responsibility as Fate. When you once decide to advocate certain values, to support them, even to commit yourself to them despite the wishes of those around you, that obliges you to persevere, even challenges you to go further and further. It's a never-ending chain, fate, which you cannot bluff your way out of until you die, even though it could be inconvenient and unpleasant to forever speak out about something, to engage politically, to play a part in public life and answer the questions of journalists, etc. In the end you have to do that anyway, because one day that responsibility will become your fate and that can't be shirked. And the later you try to get out of it the worse it is, because that would mean completely turning your back on the whole of your life to that point, on your work to that point.

DVB: When it comes to Burma, people often say that democracy is a Euro-Atlantic value. Asia has a different culture and could therefore be closer to other forms of government. Attention is often drawn to the Chinese route, or events in Russia. Don't you think that an authoritarian government, one which stabilises the country during a period of economic reform, could be better for Asia and that democracy – which brings chaos – can wait?

VH: Europe, America and the whole Euro-American space should in no way play the sole rightful exporter of democracy, teacher of democracy and expert on democracy. Nevertheless an obligation to solidarity and interest in others flows from the traditions

of our culture, the sphere of our civilisation. It is, however, necessary and imperative to respect others' cultures. That is the basis for any meaningful co-existence on earth. At the same time, it is necessary to remember that there are basic universal values which are valid everywhere – respect for human dignity, respect for basic human freedoms – and we can find their roots in all religions and in all circles of culture or civilisation.

Of course, different countries in different corners of the world take different routes to reform from above, as well as forced reforms from below. But in all cases it's always necessary for a mirror to exist which shows the regime how far it is from real respect for basic human rights and values, a mirror that will be a permanent challenge or appeal. This takes different forms in Russia and in China, but it is always one of the vanishing points or ingredients of the political process. And though these processes may be gradual, inconspicuous, they must always exist as a reminder of basic values and aims.

DVB: Together with South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu you've called on the UN Security Council to approve a resolution on Burma. Today the Council is dealing with serious issues such as Iran, Iraq, terrorism. Why do you think the issue of Burma is a subject the Security Council should discuss?

VH: The United Nations is an institution which embraces the whole globe and it should therefore concern itself with situations everywhere. That's something which follows from its basic principles. There are many issues, but the UN and the Security Council must be able to embrace them all and not exclude some just because there are others which exercise us more.

DVB: This interview is unusual in that people in Burma can watch it. Is there anything in particular you would like to say to them?

VH: Everyone who wants to live freely and have the certainty of greater respect for their human individuality shouldn't lose hope. Sometimes it takes a long time, it's difficult and you are not sure in advance that things will work out well, but my experience is that the most important thing is not to lose hope.

DVB: On Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday a year ago you said that you would very much like to meet her personally and give her a red rose for her birthday. If you had that opportunity, what would you say to Ms Suu Kyi?

VH: I actually had a plan to try it, though of course it didn't work out. On this day all I can do is send her a symbolic rose, though I firmly believe that the day will come when I will be able to give Ms Suu Kyi a real rose for her birthday, in person.

[Top](#)

Free the Lady: Call for Aung San Suu Kyi's release on her 61st birthday

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and pro-democracy Burmese activists, today unanimously called on Burma's military junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi.

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[Top](#)

Solo protestor Salai Tun Than unable to return to Burma

Jun 19, 2006

Former professor Dr. Salai Tun Than who has been planning to stage a solo protest on 19 June, the birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi, was unable to return to Rangoon as he was not allowed to board the plane of Thai Airways at Bangkok.

"Thai Airways didn't accept me. I had to return," Tun Than told DVB. "I have no problem with them. They didn't accept me because the Burmese government threatened to blacklist them if they did. That is the latest situation."

Toe Zaw Latt, one of the Burmese activists who accompanied Tun Than to the airport, told DVB that many of the supporters of the professor turned up at the airport at around 6am to see him off.

After he was refused the permission to board the plane, the Thai Foreign Ministry accepted Tun Than properly and courteously. Then, an official told him that his Thai visa is still valid despite the fact that he has no country to go to.

"They said that they recognise my current visa. I became someone who has no country as my passport was nullified. It is quite a strange scene for a Foreign Ministry official to talk properly to someone in this situation."

Than Tun added that he contacted the Burmese embassy in Bangkok but the officials there made no response.

[Top](#)

Burma's New Generation students' birthday messages

Jun 19, 2006

On Aung San Suu Kyi's 61st birthday...

Min Ko Naing said:

“I myself was someone who passed through the life of a lonely prisoner. Therefore, I sympathise with her lonely life. You don't need to fantasise it. What is certain is, she won't be feeling sorry for herself because she opposes injustice and faces a lonely life. We will work for her. By 'her', I don't mean an individual person. She is a symbol. She is the leader of a winning (political) party which was voted in by the public overwhelmingly and therefore, she is still holding the victory flag of our democracy activities. Therefore, while she is still not free, we are satisfied that it is the event to show that the public is still supporting her.”

Ko Ko Gyi said:

“Although the birthday girl could not join us in the celebration, her spirit, her mental strength is with us all. Although we are being kept separately, we do not feel scattered/separated. We are of the same flesh struggling together, that is what we feel. In fact, DawAung San Suu Kyi is the strength of all the people (of Burma) and their hope. Therefore, we all lit candles and prayed for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners. We expressed our desire by putting our signatures jointly up. Therefore, what I want say seriously today is, we demand the exceptional release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners.”

Htay Kywe said:

“Today, we are all celebrating this birthday. In Burma, people are celebrating it with great hope. It has been many occasions we have been celebrating Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday without her. Why are we still celebrating Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday? We are not celebrating it for her alone. We are doing it for the hope of the whole of Burma, for the future of the whole of Burma, for a peaceful democratic transition in Burma. I would like to wish Daw Aung San's Suu Kyi's health so that she could find peaceful solution for the future of Burma.”

Aye Aye Mon said:

“There is something Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said. She said she has the duty for the emergence of intrepidity/fearlessness, and we, the New Generation youths want to honour her by saying that we will continue to contrive for the emergence of fearlessness.”

Mee Mee said:

“As she is not able to join us, I am feeling glad and sad at the same time. The reason for my gladness is to see that although there is no birthday girl, the public is celebrating her birthday overwhelmingly as if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is in front of them. The public’s attitude towards Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is clear. I wish that in walking the rough political path, may Daw Aung San Suu Kyi be released soon and substantiate democracy for Burma.”

[Top](#)

Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday at NLD HQs in Rangoon

Jun 19, 2006

A major birthday ceremony in honour of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi was held at her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) HQs in Rangoon Shwegondaing Road.

The event was organised by NLD Women members and attended by more than 1000 celebrants including party members, leaders and renowned student leaders led by Min Ko Naing.

The event started with the traditional provision of morning nourishments to five Buddhist monks. At around 10am, several ‘peace doves’ and 100 balloons were released at the beginning of the public ceremony with Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners in mind. Then, the celebrants signed their names on a giant white billboard and prayed for her release in a hall flooded with candlelight.

At the end of the ceremony, around 2m Kyat worth of stationeries and monetary help were given to the children of political prisoners, so that they could continue their education.

[Top](#)

Rangoon solo protester missing

Jun 20, 2006

The relatives of Tun Tun from Nyaungtone Township who was arrested on 19 June for staging a solo protest outside Rangoon City Hall, are said to be very concerned for him as they don’t know where the authorities have been detaining him.

Tun Tun is said to be a former political prisoner and he made a three points demand including the release of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi who 61st birthday was being celebrated on that day.

A National League for Democracy (NLD) youth member who witnessed the peaceful protest told DVB that Tun Tun demanded transition to democracy, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and transfer of power to the rightful owner, the people, and around ten people believed to be police officers and military intelligence agents bundled him into the city hall.

“His purpose was to honour and welcome Sayagyi (Great teacher) Salai Tun Than (who failed to return to Burma from Thailand to stage a solo protest on the same day) and to demand the return of power to the people, the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the immediate transition to democracy,” the NLD youth told DVB.

Tun Tun, a schoolteacher was sentenced to 4 years in jail under the notorious 1950 Emergency Provision Act- 5J in 1994, and later imprisoned again for allegedly failing to report himself as a guest at Rangoon Twante Township’s Tanlyar Village. His family members are rightly concerned that he might be tortured by the authority agents for his action and they are still unable to make contact with him.

[Top](#)

Burmese activists continue to stage hunger strike outside White House

Jun 20, 2006

Pro-democracy Burmese activists are continuing to stage hunger strike outside the White House in Washington D.C. despite the heavy downpours.

The activists are demanding the US government to push harder for Burma to be hauled before the UN Security Council. The hunger strike started on 18 June.

“There are still 6 protestors to this day,” one of the protestors, Aung Thet told DVB. “We are all well. We are all happy and in good health. We are continuing the protest. Last night the weather was atrocious. At around 8pm, it started to rain at the US White House until 10pm. We were squatting with our waterproofs under the heavy rains, and we re-unfurled our posters and continued our protest. At 8am, it was raining sporadically and we continued to protest and fight on when there was pure daylight and fine weather at 9am.”

Meanwhile, a report from Kuala Lumpur said that Lawmakers from six Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries defied Thailand and other governments and called for Burma to be hauled before the UN Security Council. They said their governments were lost on how to deal with the Burmese military junta.

Expressing growing frustration across the region, the ASEAN special committee on Burma, ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), said there had been no sign of change despite calls for democracy and the release of political prisoners like Aung San Suu Kyi.

“We urge the United Nations to take the issue to the Security Council,” said the chairman of the AIPMC, Malaysia’s Zaid Ibrahim. “There is no democratic progress in Myanmar (Burma) and ASEAN is lost on what to do...Unless there is pressure from the UN and the Security Council, I do not see any changes taking place and Aung San Suu Kyi will continue to be detained.

Zaid added that regional heavyweights China and India must also play a bigger role in ending Rangoon’s repressive policies and campaigning for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Last December the United States pushed the UN Security Council to hold a briefing on human rights and other problems in Burma for the first time.

UN Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown said Monday that it was possible Burma could be referred to Security Council

[Top](#)

Burma NLD starts petition to have leader, prisoners freed

Jun 21, 2006

Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) is continuing with the collective-signature campaign for the release of its Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners that began on her birthday on 19 June.

Up to now, the party has received nearly 1,500 signatures on the 20' by 7' wall-mounted white sheet of paper. Apart from the NLD party members, passerbys have also given their signatures. The NLD spokesman Nyan Win told the DVB that it is the NLD's effort to represent the desires of the people.

The sheet for the signatures is on the ground floor of the NLD headquarters in Rangoon. The title on the sheet says, "Expression of wishes for the release of leader Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners to enable a resolution of political affairs through political means."

However, the military government is not taking heed of the NLD request. Criticisms and attacks levelled in the dailies today and before serve as witnesses, saying that the members are resigning from the party because they cannot accept its "wrong policies".

[Top](#)

Solo protester Tun Tun released

Jun 21, 2006

The authorities of Burma's military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) have released Tun Tun from Nyaungtone Township, who staged a solo protest in front of Rangoon City Hall on 19 June in honour of detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's 61st birthday and Dr. Salai Tun Than who was barred from entering Burma from Thailand that day.

Tun Tun, a former political prisoner, was arrested from the front of the Town Hall and taken to the interrogation office in Kyauktada Township. He told DVB how he replied to queries of the authorities.

"When they asked me the reason for staging the protest, I answered: As Professor Salai Tun Than 's plan to stage a protest in front of the Town Hall could not be implemented, I staged the protest on his behalf so that he can feel comfort."

Tun Tun added the authorities treated him nicely and that there was no beating or torture. However, he was asked to sign the surety agreement. Ko Tun Tun explains what the agreement says and why he signed it.

“The agreement reads - I have staged a solo protest for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I agree and promise not to stage such protests that show disrespect to the government in the future. I would not have signed the agreement if my sisters and brothers were not beside me. As my sister is a civil servant and she looked worried that I may be sent to prison and besides I have many things to attend to, so I signed the agreement. After this, at 0500 pm, accompanied by a local SB (Special Branch) officer, I returned to Nyaungtone.”

When asked why authorities released him when in the past, they arrested, assaulted, tortured, and imprisoned solo protesters, politicians, and NLD (National League for Democracy) members, Tun Tun answered: “They (authorities) said those events took place because of the inconsiderate and immoral behaviour of the (then) military intelligence. The SB officer explained with a smile that such unjust arrests and tortures no longer exist in this era, this age, and this time. The sense is that the present government will not arrest unjustly or beat any citizens.”

Although the authorities gave explanation to Tun Tun and released him, observers criticized the authorities and raised questions why they have not released law student Thet Naung Soe, and NLD youth member Tun Lin Kyaw, who were also arrested for staging similar solo protests and are now serving long-term imprisonment.

[Top](#)

Political prisoner Saw Win's condition continues to deteriorate

Jun 29, 2006

The health condition of political prisoner Saw Win who has been serving a lengthy jail-term at Kalemyo Prison, Sagaing Division in northwest Burma, is continuing to deteriorate, according to his mother.

Saw Win has been suffering from severe back pain since early this year and he is also starting to suffer gastric complaints, according to his mother, Mya Yi who went to see him at the prison recently.

“I have this stabbing pain in my back, he said. It is like being prodded with a stick...I also bought medicines for him. The doctor said it is his back and liver. If it is liver, he should be bloated, but he is not. I think it is the consequence of the tortures he received. It must be he was tortured when he was arrested. they didn't go away completely. He is thin. And he lost weight. He also lost his appetite. He said it feels gastric disease.”

As there is no prison doctor at Kalemyo, Saw Win's diseases are unlikely to be cured completely, Mya Yi insisted. She also expressed concerns for her son. Similarly,

another long-term political prisoner at Kalemyo Prison, Aye Aung is also suffering from gastric complaints due to the dire quality of food served inside the prison.

[Top](#)

The State will not feed prisoners anymore - Burmese prison staff

Jun 29, 2006

From the end of this year, Burma's military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) will stop providing food to prisoners at jails and police-controlled labour camps (gulags), an official at Rangoon Insein Jail who doesn't want to be named told DVB.

According to the official, the State will provide only salaries and subsidised rice to prison staff, and prison officials concerned must find their own ways of feeding prisoners, said the Interior Ministry in a directive sent to prison officials last month.

The ministry instructed officials to force prisoners to utilise and work on wild and uncultivated lands allocated by the State, and use the proceeds to feed prisoners. Officials were also instructed to dissolve the 'upper and lower' Burma prison formation and form new prison groups according to the states and divisions.

The new orders are to be carried out by prison directors-in-chief, and prison officials are said to be complaining about their luck. The official added it would impossible to feed all prisoners at Insein Jail as there are thousands of them - unless they oppress and bully the prisoners by using all available crooked means..

[Top](#)