

PRESS RELEASE

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INDIA URGED TO STOP SUPPORTING SPDC

Chiangmai - "Stop support to the brutal military government! Withdraw economic support to SPDC!" These were the shouts of international Human Rights activists who trooped to the Indian Consulate in Chiangmai today as part of its campaign for democracy in Burma.

Activists from India, Mongolia, Belgium, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, Fiji, Indonesia, Canada, Japan and Malaysia delivered their letter to the Indian government, urging it to stop supporting the military junta in Burma.

"The violent ambush on Black Friday and the ensuing crackdown is the most serious recent attack on Burma's democracy," according to the letter which was signed by organisations and individuals under the group's name, Friends of Burma Coalition.

The "Black Friday" refers to the May 30, 2003 incident where un-armed democracy supporters were attacked reportedly by the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), and troops of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Still an undetermined number of democracy supporters have been killed. Aung San Suu Kyi, the popular opposition leader was abducted by the military, and has been in the SPDC custody since then. There were other leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) who were reportedly missing.

"It has been 11 days since Aung San Suu Kyi has been taken into custody by the military. Apart from the report of UN Special Envoy Razali that she was in her high spirits when they met for 30 minutes yesterday, there is nothing we have heard about her release. This is just not acceptable," says Titi Soentoro of Women's Solidarity for Human Rights in Indonesia. "SPDC has to have more pressure from the international community for her immediate release."

Titi Soentoro was one of the 3 people allowed to enter the office of Mr.J. Abraham, the Indian Consular in Chiangmai. "Mr. Abraham has assured us that the Indian government is also not pleased with the May 30 incident in Burma. According to him, the Indian government has already expressed this in previous statements."

India, along with China and Thailand, are perceived to be the most important friends that enable the Burmese military regime to survive. "There has been a lot of condemnation of the fascist regime in Burma from the international community. But talk is cheap. There has to be concrete actions against the SPDC," says Judy A. Pasimio from Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). India has been actively forging bilateral ties with Burma. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has been reportedly primarily responsible for the development of economic ties with the

junta. "India has to suspend and seriously review its trade policies with and economic and military support to a regime that uses these assistance to further entrench itself into power, while continuing its oppressive and violent rule over its people with impunity." According to Judy, the upcoming Asean Regional Forum (ARF) would be a critical venue. "We are urging the members of the ARF to put Burma and its current political crisis in the priority agenda."

"But the urgent call of the coalition is for India, as a good friend of SPDC, to urge the military junta to release immediately and unconditionally Aung San Suu Kyi and the other NLD leaders," says Bee, a Thai member of the Friends of Burma Coalition. "While Mr. Abraham was kind enough to receive our letter to the Indian government, we need to step up our pressure to the Indian government to make use of its influence on SPDC." According to Bee, there would be more actions to be taken by the Friends of Burma Coalition. "Obviously, SPDC does not really care about its reputation. What matters to this regime is that they still have the support of their few but powerful friends. We hope that Indian government, as well as Chinese government will take the side of the people of Burma, and not the military junta."

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