

Shame on the UPA Govt.'s Shameful Support to The Burmese Military Dictatorship!

Support The Heroic Battle of Burmese People for Democracy!

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"We have strategic and economic interests to protect in Burma. It is up to the Burmese people to struggle for democracy." – Pranab Mukherjee, Foreign Minister, UPA Government.

"We value our growing military relations with Burma" – outgoing Army Chief JJ Singh.

On the streets of Myanmar, Buddhist monks are at the forefront of a remarkable upsurge against the military dictatorship. They – and anyone who is seen with them – are being crushed ruthlessly with bludgeons and bullets. Recently, a Japanese photographer covering one of the peaceful demonstrations was shot dead in cold blood by the Burmese military.

This isn't the first time blood has flowed on the streets of Burma. The pro-democracy movement in Burma has kept alive despite harsh, cruel, unrelenting repression. During the 1988 movement, the dictatorship was reeling under the impact of strikes in the oil industry, transport, postal services, telecommunications and factories, as well as widespread protests; and brutal and bloody repression was unable to end it. The dictatorship managed to cling to power by striking a deal with the main political opposition, the NLD, to end the protests in return for elections in 1990. Having staved off the uprising, the generals rejected the outcome of the elections, suppressed the opposition and continued in power. NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi was elected in a landslide victory – but has spent most of her time since in imprisonment or exile.

There is an enormous gulf between the pampered lifestyle of the generals and the poverty of Burmese people. The latest protests were triggered last month by the junta's decision to slash price subsidies on petrol, diesel and gas, increasing transport costs and sending the price of basic items skyrocketing.

In the latest round of resistance to the military regime, monks who are a large and influential institution in Burmese society have refused to accept donations from the military. This is a major embarrassment for the military generals who claim to be devout Buddhists. Some Burmese military officers have formed a group called the Public Patriot Army Association and expressed their backing for the monks' movement. In Burma, priests have a long history of joining political struggles, from the fight against British colonial rule to the pro-democracy uprising in 1988 that was crushed by the army. Monks run the only schools in rural areas; monasteries also often provide money for medicines and offer meals for the destitute. This time, monks have demanded an instant reduction in fuel prices, the release of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and a swift move to democracy.

The attitude of successive Indian governments to the Burmese dictatorship has been one of shamefully close and warm economic and military ties; the Burmese military is supposed to cooperate with the Indian military in repression of insurgency in the North East. Even now, as pro-democracy activists are being massacred on the streets of Burma, the UPA Government has sent its Petroleum Minister Murli Deora to clinch oil and gas contracts with Burma.

India's appeasement of the military dictatorship is a reflection of the same appeasement by the US and UK. George Bush has made loud noises calling for sanctions against Burma. Washington's objection to the Burmese junta is not its suppression of democratic rights, but its close alignment with China. No doubt, China and Russia are cynically supporting repressive regimes to advance their economic and strategic interests. But they are not alone. Burma's largest trading partner is not China, but neighbouring Thailand, which is ruled by a military dictatorship with tacit US support. The Bush administration's campaign on Burma is not motivated by concerns for ordinary Burmese, but is aimed at establishing a pro-US regime in Rangoon as part of its strategic encirclement of China.

US and European corporates continue to do business with the Burmese military regime. The EU has bolstered the regime by increasing imports from Burma, worth around US\$4 billion between 1998 and 2002. The Total Oil Company, part-owned by the French government, is the largest foreign investor in Burma, where the oil companies' infrastructure of roads and railway access have long been the subject of allegations of forced labour. Other such corporates include the US oil corporation Unocal. The military dictatorship uses such foreign investment to buy the weapons that shore up its reign of terror.

Pranab Mukherjee says it's the Burmese people's job to struggle for democracy - while it's the Indian government's job to 'safeguard' its business and military interests by cosying up to the military dictatorship! Well, we must tell our Government that the Indian people consider it their job to support the brave struggle of the Burmese people for democracy, and also to resist the Indian Government's shameful support for the dictatorship.

Protest in Delhi against Crack-down on Burmese People

The All Burma Students' League (ABSL) organised a protest at Jantar-Mantar on 2 Oct. against the brutal crack-down on Burmese people by the military junta of that country. The protestors demanded from the government of India for taking a proactive and pro-people action on Burma. Various democratic organisations and individuals participated in the protest. Comrades Prabhat Kumar and Kumudini Pati addressed the gathering on behalf of the CPI(ML).

P.S.

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