


Political Prisoner Profile

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| AAPP CASE NO.: | 0032 | | |  |
| NAME OF POLITICAL PRISONER: | U Thura @ Zarganar | | | |
| GENDER: | Male | Ethnicity: | Burmese | |
| DATE OF BIRTH: | 27 January 1961 | Age: | 47 | |
| RELIGION: | Buddhist | | | |
| PARENTS NAME: | U Nan Nyunt Swe and Daw Kyi Oo | | | |
| EDUCATION: | A degree in dental surgery from Yangon University of Dental Medicine in 1985 | | | |
| OCCUPATION: | Comedian, Film Actor and Director, Former P.P | | | |
| LAST ADDRESS: | Sanchaung Township, Rangoon | | | |
| ARREST DATE: | 4 June 2008 | | | |
| SECTION OF LAW: | 295 (A), 505 (B), and 6 charges in total | | | |
| SENTENCING HISTORY: | Under trial | | | |
| COURT HEARING: | Special Court in Insein prison (under the jurisdiction of Rangoon Western District Court) | | | |
| NAME OF PRISON: | Insein prison | | | |
| RELEASE DATE: | | | | |
| IMMEDIATE HEALTH CONCERNS: | On 15 October 2008, Zarganar asked his family to bring him medicine for liver and stomach complaints. | | | |
| CURRENT STATUS SUMMARY: | U Thura is currently being held in Insein prison. | | | |
| CAREER BACKGROUND: | <p>U Thura (also known as Zarganar, meaning 'tweezers' in Burmese) was born into a political and intellectual family; the youngest of three sons of well-known writer Daw Kyi Oo and U Nan Nyunt Swe. U Thura graduated from Yangon's elite Dagon 1 High School in 1977 and received a degree in dental surgery from Yangon University of Dental Medicine in 1985. While in dentistry school, he worked as a volunteer literacy teacher in Chin State and wrote about his experiences in a book, published by the <i>Sape Beikman</i>, the country's official literary publishing house.</p> <p>During the 1988 uprising, Zarganar was arrested for being an "instigator" and sent to the notorious Insein prison for several months.</p> <p>After his release, Zarganar was arrested again for helping his mother during her campaign to run as an individual candidate in the May 1990 general elections. He was sentenced to a further 5 years imprisonment in Insein prison in May 1990.</p> <p>In May 2006, Zarganar was banned from performing in the country after giving an interview to the BBC regarding government regulations on the Thingyan water festival, and for making a television commercial promoting Taiwanese Independence.</p> <p>On 25 September 2007, Zarganar was arrested at his home for his role in the monks' "Saffron Revolution". During the preceding two days he had publicly delivered food and water to Buddhist monks preparing to protest, together with fellow Burmese actor and celebrity Kyaw Thu. The weekend before that, he had urged the public to support the monks in interviews with radio stations based outside Burma. He was released from Insein prison on 17 October 2007.</p> <p>After Cyclone Nargis devastated vast swathes of the Irrawaddy delta, Zarganar was heavily involved in delivering volunteer disaster relief aid in the cyclone-damaged areas. An estimated 400 Burmese involved in the entertainment world joined together to help.</p> <p>He is married to Ma Lwin Mar Oo who lives in the United States.</p> | | | |

ARREST DETAILS:

The comedian, actor and director U Thura (aka) Zarganar, who was leading volunteer aid efforts for Nargis Cyclone victims, was arrested at 9 pm at his Sanchaung home on 4 June 2008. Family members confirmed that the district police commander of Western Rangoon together with 9 other policemen came to the house at 8:30 pm and searched it thoroughly.

The police officers confiscated a computer, video CDs of Than Shwe's daughter's wedding, Rambo 4 (banned in Burma) and footage of Cyclone Nargis and its aftermath, a cash account book and 30 foreign exchange coupons (each valued at \$1, used in place of hard foreign currency which is banned in Burma).

“They said it would take one or two days but they asked us to pack medications and clothing,” Ma Htwe, Zarganar’s sister-in-law, told Radio Free Asia’s Burmese service. “They said they would bring him back, but he’s still not home. I didn’t believe them. They always do that, they always say one or two days, but I never trust them. They are always trying to twist and turn the law,” Ma Htwe said. “We have always been bullied, whatever happens they say it’s Zarganar, never anyone else. Everyone from the arts world has done this, but no one else has been called for interrogation. Only Zarganar,” she said.

DETAILS OF IMPRISONMENT:

On 21 August 2008, he appeared before Insein Prison Special Court, under the jurisdiction of Rangoon Western District Court. Zarganar was accused with a total of 6 charges, brought by police officer U Ye Nyunt. His other co-accused are Zaw Thet Htway (a former political prisoner and magazine editor), Thant Zin Aung and Khin Maung Aye. All were closely involved in cyclone relief efforts.

Zarganar and his co-accused face the following charges brought by the police prosecutor:

- (1) Section 505 (B) of Penal Code, Statements inciting public mischief act
- (2) Section 295 (B) of Penal Code, deliberate and malicious insult to religion
- (3) Section 32 (B) and 36 of the Video Act
- (4) Section 33 (a) of the Electronic Communications Law
- (5) Section 17 (2) of the Unlawful Association Act
- (6) Section 33 (a) and 38 of the Electronic Communications Law

Latest developments:

On 9 October 2008 prosecutor police major Ye Nyunt who brought the charges in Zarganar’s case, attempted suicide, according to Radio Free Asia. NLD lawyer U Aung Thein has been representing Zarganar, but on 20 October he announced that Zarganar and another client U Gambira are to withdraw the power of attorney from their lawyer in protest at the unfair way in which their trials are being conducted.

Honorable Awards:

1 PEN Canada Launches 25th Anniversary by granting One Humanity Award to Burmese Poet and Comedian ZARGANA - Winner of the PEN Canada 2008

A - Humanity Award

B - PEN Canada honorary member since 1990

C - IFOA Empty Chair 2008

Profile prepared by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (Burma) on 19 June 2008, and updated on 4 November 2008.