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Myanmar: Fears grow for world's youngest prisoner of conscience

The world's youngest prisoner of conscience -- a three-year-old girl recently arrested and imprisoned by the Burmese military -- may suffer serious health problems during her imprisonment, Amnesty International said today.

"Locking up a young child -- effectively holding her hostage to force her father out of hiding -- exposes the extent of the Burmese government's ruthlessness in trying to stamp out political dissent," Amnesty International said.

"Thaint Wunna Khin may suffer serious physical and psychological damage during her detention. Myanmar's government should immediately end this meaningless and cruel ordeal by releasing the child and her mother."

Three-year-old Thaint Wunna Khin is one of 19 people arrested between 19 and 24 July in Pegu, central Myanmar. All are thought to be prisoners of conscience, detained on suspicion of planning a 19 July march to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of General Aung San's assassination. General Aung San fought for independence from the British and was the father of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) opposition party.

Between 16 and 18 July, pamphlets announcing the march were distributed and messages were spray-painted on walls calling for support for the NLD, for prices to be lowered, and for civil servants' salaries to be raised.

The local Military Intelligence (MI) arrested Thaint Wunna Khin and her mother, Ma Khin Khin Leh, when they could not find her father, Kyaw Wunna. They arrested six other members of his family on 23 July. A further 11 people who distributed pamphlets were arrested between 19 and 24 July. The local branch of MI, MI3, is believed to be interrogating all 19 people at several locations.

Detainees, especially young political activists, are frequently tortured and ill-treated in Myanmar's detention centers, particularly in the early stages of detention.

Amnesty International is urging the State Peace and Development Council, Myanmar's military government, to immediately and unconditionally release the other 17 political activists unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

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