

## Labour unions to form caucus to free Suu Kyi

Labour unions from all over the world have pledged to fight for the release of detained Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi at a two-day Burma Conference here.

Spearheaded by the International Trade Union Federation (ITUF), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Global Union Federations, nearly 40 trade unions from the Asia-Pacific, [Europe](#) and North America held the 4th International Trade Union Conference on Burma in Kathmandu this week.

The two-day conference, also attended by exiled Myanmar leaders and trade unions, is asking for the release of Suu Kyi, Nobel laureate and leader of the National League for Democracy who remains under house arrest despite her party winning the election in 1990.

'The Burma Conference condemns the continuing detention of Suu Kyi and detention and abuse of over 1,000 political prisoners, many of whom have died as a result of ill treatment in detention,' the conference declaration Thursday said.

The trade unions said they would step up the campaign to persuade companies engaged in Myanmar to stop all economic and trade relations and investments until democracy is established and forced labour eradicated.

Currently, countries like China, India and the US have increased new investments in Myanmar, ITUF general secretary Guy Ryder said.

The labour campaign will especially target multinationals operating in oil, gas, mining, dams and infrastructure and ask financial institutions to terminate lending.

It is also asking insurance companies to terminate their coverage in Myanmar.

Priority will be given to forming parliamentary caucuses on Myanmar, especially in the SAARC region.

The Burma Conference said the military junta was practising widespread and systematic violation of human rights, committing routine rape and promoting trafficking of women and drugs.

India along with China came under strong condemnation at the conference initially.

'The Burma Conference condemns the increasing political and economic support provided to the regime by China and India,' the first draft of the declaration said.

However, after trade unionists from India said that might harden the India's government's stance, it was changed to 'the neighbouring countries' instead of China and India.

According to Indian trade union INTUC, [New Delhi](#) once actively supported the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar during the government of Rajiv Gandhi.

It says the present government should be reminded of that and persuaded to press the regime to start talks with Suu Kyi's party.

In 1988, an army general, Gen Saw seized control of the government, replacing it with a new body, the State Law and Order Restoration Council.

In 1990 the junta allowed the first multi-party election in three decades, when Suu Kyi's opposition coalition won a landslide victory, but it refused to hand over power.

While Suu Kyi remains under house arrest, 34 of her MPs are in exile and 13 in prison.

Two were assassinated outside Myanmar and over 100 MPs living in Myanmar were forced to resign.

*Sudeshna Sarkar* ( © IANS / India eNews)