



BURMA REPORT

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Free all political prisoners, free Aung San Suu Kyi, free Burma.

AFP – 03 March 2008 - "EBO" Euro-Burma Office <burma@euro-burma.be> -04.03.08 <http://www.euro-burma.eu/www.euro-burma.eu>

UN envoy to visit Myanmar Thursday

UNITED NATIONS - UN troubleshooter Ibrahim Gambari will return to Myanmar on Thursday, a UN spokeswoman said Monday.

Michele Montas said Gambari, UN chief Ban Ki-moon's special adviser on Myanmar, would leave Tuesday for the visit at the invitation of the government.

She told a press briefing that Gambari would arrive in the Southeast Asian nation on Thursday "and hopes to stay as long as necessary and to consult with a broad range of representatives of Myanmar society, including all the groups which he was not able to see during his last visit (last year)."

Montas said details of the program were still being worked out and noted that Gambari "looks forward to the continued cooperation of the Myanmar government."

It will be Gambari's third visit to Myanmar since the junta's deadly crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in September.

The Irrawaddy - February 19, 2008 - The Irrawaddy Online News Alert: The Irrawaddy <news@irrawaddy.org>

Gambari Says Burma Constitution Move Significant -

By TINI TRAN / AP WRITER / BEIJING Tuesday, February 19, 2008 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=10461



UN special envoy to Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari, left, is greeted by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi during their meeting in Beijing (Photo: AP)

UN Special Envoy for Burma Ibrahim Gambari said Tuesday that proposals by the ruling Burmese military government calling for a May referendum on a constitution written under military guidance and general elections in 2010 were significant steps forward.

Gambari, who was in Beijing for talks with Chinese officials, also said China could help by sending signals to Burma's leaders that they need to cooperate.

"This is a significant step as it marks the first time that we have an established a time frame for the implementation of its political roadmap," he said.

Earlier this month, the Burmese government announced it would hold a May referendum on a constitution written under military guidance and multiparty elections by 2010, the first specific dates for steps in an earlier-announced "Road Map to Democracy."

The plans have been widely criticized for failing to include any input from Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, which complained Monday that the junta's recent moves toward reform were not enough.

The NLD won general elections in 1990 but was not allowed to take power.

Gambari said he had not seen a draft of the constitution and that it was too soon to say if the United Nations would be involved in the

referendum process.

However, he said Burma must create "an atmosphere conducive to credible elections," adding that this must include the release of political prisoners and relaxation of restrictions on Suu Kyi, who remains under house arrest.

Gambari said he is not discouraged by the slow pace of discussions, but that ultimately the UN wants "tangible results."

Gambari, who met earlier with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and other top officials, said he had held constructive and frank talks with China about the situation.

Praising Beijing for its role in mediating his access to Burma and its government, Gambari said China can help by sending signals to Burma's leaders that they need to cooperate.

China, along with other nations, can assist the UN mission by "sending the right message to authorities in Myanmar [Burma] to continue to cooperate," he said. "This is not just an issue for the Chinese. This is an issue for the international community," he said

The envoy said he expected to return to Burma "certainly well before April" to resume talks with the ruling junta.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao repeated China's promises to play a constructive role in the mediation but said that dialogue, not international sanctions, would be key in finding a resolution.

"Pressure and sanctions at this time will not help solve the issue," he said.

China is a key stop on Gambari's sweep through the region because Beijing is an important trading partner and arms provider for the generals who run the country. He will also be heading to Indonesia, Singapore and Japan to urge those countries to support UN efforts with Burma.

China objects to Western criticisms of Burma's military regime, saying conditions in the country have improved dramatically since a violent crackdown on peaceful protests in September.

However, China has been credited with convincing Burma's generals to issue visas for Gambari to visit.

Bangkok Post-02-20-2008

UN will press Burma over Suu Kyi

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New York (dpa) - The United Nations Wednesday said constitutional reforms will be the subject of a new round of talks between its envoy Ibrahim Gambari and Burmese military leaders, after opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was barred from running in upcoming elections.

Gambari, who was visiting Southeast Asia, has planned to visit Rangoon for the third time since last September, though it is unknown exactly when he will make the trip.

The visit has become more urgent after a draft constitution issued by the military junta said Suu Kyi would not be able to run in 2010 elections because she was married to a Briton, who died in 1999.

"We believe that the credibility of the political process (in Burma) is going to depend on whether it is inclusive enough so that all can participate," UN spokeswoman Marie Okabe said.

The constitutional process will be "on top on the agenda of special envoy Gambari when he has the chance to visit Myanmar and have direct discussions with authorities and all the relevant parties to the process, including Suu Kyi. We hope that happens soon," Okabe said.

Myanmar is the name the junta uses for Burma.

Suu Kyi is leader of the National League for Democracy, which won a landslide victory in the presidential elections in 1990. The military junta rejected the elections and put her under house arrest.

The UN has been calling on Burma to launch democratic reforms and release all political prisoners.

Gambari, who visited Beijing Tuesday, called on the Chinese government to send the "right signals" to demand cooperation from the ruling military junta.

He then travelled to Singapore and planned to visit Jakarta and Japan for the purpose of canvassing support for democratic changes in Burma.

http://www.bangkokpost.com/breaking_news/breakingnews.php?id=126051

USA Today- (13.02.2008) 00:05:53 - http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-02-11-un-burma_N.htm

U.N. chief urges talks in Burma

Burma News Summary - 2008-02-12 - anil verma <anilverma7@yahoo.com> - nld group member <nldmembersnsupportersofcrppnnldndassk@yahoogroups.com>



U.N. secretary-general Ban Ki-

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Burma's military government on Monday to hold substantive talks with detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on a constitutional referendum.

He also called on the government to grant a visa to the top U.N. envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, to visit Burma again in the very near future. Gambari will visit Beijing on Feb. 18-19, then travel to Jakarta on a date to be confirmed, and to Singapore on Feb. 25, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

Ban said it was critical that the junta meets with Suu Kyi quickly to ensure that the constitution it plans to put to a referendum represents all people in the country.

Last week, the government announced the May referendum and a general election in 2010. It was the first time it has set dates for specific steps in its so-called road map to democracy, which has been widely criticized for failing to include any input from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, which won the last election in 1990, and ethnic minorities.

Scheduling the referendum for May makes it difficult for the junta's critics to mount a campaign against it, particularly because most of the country's leading pro-democracy activists are in jail, many detained in connection with anti-government demonstrations held in August and September last year.

Two of Burma's top dissident groups, one led by Buddhist monks and one led by students, on Monday denounced the constitutional referendum as an effort to perpetuate the junta's rule.

The Generation 88 Student group, most of whose leaders were arrested during and after last year's protests, asked the U.N. Security Council to pressure the junta for reforms and Ban should visit Burma as soon as possible.

Asked whether the secretary-general planned a visit to Burma, Montas said "not at this point, but he's certainly aware of the Generation 88 statement."

Ban made clear that the United Nations remains highly critical of the constitution-drafting process.

"The secretary-general renews his call to the Burma authorities to make the constitution-making process inclusive, participatory and transparent in order to ensure that any draft constitution is broadly representative of the views of all the people of Burma," Montas said.

"In this regard, he believes it is now all the more important for the Burma leadership to engage without delay in a substantive and time-bound dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other relevant parties to the national reconciliation process," Montas said.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has been in prison or under house arrest for more than 12 of the past 18 years.

Following the junta's violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests last year, Western nations and the U.N. pressed the country's military leaders to hold talks with Suu Kyi to bring about democratic reform. The junta appointed a ministerial-level official, Aung Kyi, to meet with her, but according to a party member Suu Kyi is not satisfied with the progress of her meetings.

Burma, also known as Myanmar, has been under military rule since 1962 and has not had a constitution since the last one was scrapped in 1988, when the army brutally put down earlier pro-democracy demonstrations and the current junta took power.

The country has been in a political deadlock since the military refused to recognize the 1990 election results, saying after the polls that the country first needed a new constitution.

Guidelines for a new constitution were adopted by a national convention last year, and a government-appointed commission is now drafting the document.

Critics denounced the constitutional convention process as a stage-managed farce because the military hand-picked most delegates. The National League for Democracy charged that the junta was trying to draft a constitution unilaterally, and it therefore "could not be expected to guarantee democracy, human rights and public well-being."

[Shan-EUgroup] - "Shan-EU" <shaneu31@yahoo.com> - No.12 – 2/2008 - 11 February 2008

Time for junta to be serious - By: Sai Wansai, 10 February 2008

The Burmese junta's announcement that the time has now come to change from military rule to democratic civilian rule and multi-party election would be held in 2010 is a surprise, although the move could neither be seen as a step forward nor just usual stalling tactics of the junta to cling on to power indefinitely.

Most of the regime's critics are not convinced, given the fact that election could be held in 2010 as planned, when the result of constitutional referendum, which is only due in May of this year and the outcome is still far from certain.

Perhaps looking at it from the junta's perspective, it might have been considered a done deal, if the rigged 1974 constitutional referendum, which was stage-managed and coerced by the then military regime sailed through unopposed, could be taken as an indication. In other words, the junta will pull it through, by hook or by crook.

And if the referendum could be manipulated, the junta might as well do the same with 2010 nation-wide election.

Regardless of such speculation, the junta should be given the benefit of the doubt. To prove its good will, sincerity and seriousness against all stakeholders, it could definitely implement some basic confidence-building, which are within its bound and capacity.

The first thing the junta could do is improving or creating a favourable political climate, which includes among others, the unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Khun Htoon Oo, General Hsur Hten and all political prisoners; declaring nation-wide cease-fire with all ethnic resistance armies; facilitating freedom of expression and freedom to form and operate political organisation.

With the improving political climate, the junta's constitutional blue print could be discussed in an open and transparent manner, leading to an acceptable constitution after some adjustment or amendment made by all stakeholders within Burma arena. After this, the agreed draft constitution would be ready for referendum, which preferably could be held under the auspices of the United Nations.

Once this get started, it will gain momentum and the rest will fall into place. All that is urgently needed now is a sincere political will for a better change from the junta.

The junta needs to understand that the key words to real reconciliation and democratisation are none other than "all-inclusiveness, political accommodation and levelled playing field". Anything less would only mean the continuation of tyrannical rule and total control of the populace, which, in turn, would be met with resistance again and again, as have been evident by the recent, September Saffron Revolution, the 1962, 1974 and 1988 mass uprisings.

It is high time for the junta to seriously push for a civilised and smooth change in real words and deeds.

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AFP – 09 February 2008

Myanmar announces constitutional referendum in May

Burma News - 11 February 2008 - "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be> - 12.02.2008 -12:19:44

YANGON — Myanmar's military government announced Saturday via state media that it will hold a referendum on a new constitution in May, clearing the way for multi-party elections in 2010.

"The referendum on the new constitution will be held in May 2008," state media announced.

"Multi-party democratic elections will be held in 2010, according to the new constitution," it added.

"It is suitable to change the military administration to a democratic, civil administrative system, as good fundamentals have been established," it said.

"The country's basic infrastructure has been built, although there is still more to do in striving for the welfare of the nation," said the government statement, read out over state television.

Scheduling of the referendum and the election is unlikely to mollify the junta's critics, who charge that the proposed constitution is likely to be to be unfair and undemocratic.

Guidelines for a new constitution were adopted by a national convention last year, and a government-appointed commission is now drafting the document.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Monday, March 3, 2008 - news@irrawaddy.org - - **BurmaNet News**, March 1 - 3, 2008 - March 1-3, 2008 Issue # 3414
- "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> - **Burma News** - Euro-Burma Office "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be>

Three People Arrested for Comments on Referendum - The Irrawaddy
- By WAI MOE - 03 March 2008

Three Rangoon men were arrested on Friday for casual comments they made about the Burmese referendum and general election, according to sources.

A businessman who spoke on condition of anonymity told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday that three car brokers at the Rangoon car market were taken away by Burmese special police after they made casual comments in support of the main opposition National League for Democracy.

"Members of the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association, the pro-junta mass organization] came and talked about the new constitution and referendum at the car market on Friday," said the source.

"Then the brokers told the USDA members in joking that they 'should not waste their time' because in the final days people would vote as recommended by the NLD [led by Aung San Suu Kyi]. Later the special police came and arrested three of them."

The Burmese military government has scheduled a referendum on a draft constitution in May and a general election in 2010, as the fourth and fifth step of its "road map to democracy" process.

Aung Thein, a lawyer in Rangoon, said the arrests may be the first such cases since the junta passed a new decree on February 26 forbidding negative comments about the referendum, which allows a sentence of up to three years imprisonment.

"But we don't know if the people arrested will be charged under that decree," he said. He said that authorities have an option to charge people who speak out against the constitutional process under emergency acts 3 and 4 under decree 5/96 announced in 1996, barring negative comments. Anyone found guilty under that decree could receive up to 20 years in prison.

Meanwhile, five people, mostly family members of 88 Generation Students group members, were arrested last week.

They are Thanda Win, the wife of Mya Aye, a leader of the 88 Generation Students group; Hla Moe, the husband of 88 group member Mie Mie; Kanet, the brother of Marky, an 88 group member; and Naing Htwe and May Mie Lwin.

No reasons for the arrests are known at this time among the Rangoon activist community.

BurmaNewsGroup:Shan-EU <shaneu31@yahoo.com> - 22.02.2008 08:16

The Financial Times - <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8658fe42-e0e9-11dc-b0d7-0000779fd2ac.html> -

Burma's constitution attacked

By John Aglionby in Jakarta and Amy Kazmin in Bangkok - Published: February 22 2008 02:00 | Last updated: February 22 2008 02:00

Indonesia became the first big developing country yesterday to criticise Burma's draft constitution, which entrenches military rule by banning leading opposition activists from politics, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel prize-winning democracy advocate.

Hassan Wirajuda, Indonesia's foreign minister, said the constitution should be revised before being put to a national referendum in May, to ensure that the interests of opposition and minority groups were protected.

His comments were made days after Burma's military rulers publicly clarified that Ms Suu Kyi, now a widow, would be prohibited from contesting Burma's planned 2010 elections because she had married a foreigner.

"We hope that in the period between now and May, a process of consultation will take in input from these groups so that

the draft constitution which will be voted on will be comprehensive, meaning that it will accommodate their interests," Mr Hassan told the Financial Times.

The Burmese junta insists its charter will lay the foundation for a "disciplined democracy" suitable for Burma's multi-ethnic -population.

But opposition groups have denounced it as an attempt to legalise military rule, while Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy has complained that the army's "unilateral" referendum plans "did not support meaningful political dialogue or the national reconciliation process".

Under the proposed constitution, 25 per cent of parliamentary seats will be reserved for the military, while the army chief can appoint key ministers, and declare a state of emergency, seizing widespread powers. Protection of basic rights and civil liberties will be highly conditional, and easily curbed by the military.

The constitutional provisions governing election eligibility also make it clear that political dissidents can easily be excluded from running for public office.

"It's already rigged," said Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political analyst in exile. "Anyone who has been an active campaigner for democracy, or has been against the military at some point, or has the potential to do so, will be disqualified."

The charter bars from office anyone married to a foreigner, or whose spouse or children have foreign citizenship, as well as Buddhist monks and other religious figures. It also bars political prisoners and civil servants, except for soldiers.

Parliamentary candidates must have lived in Burma for 10 consecutive years.

**THE
IRRAWADDY**
Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

Karen Rebel Leader Assassinated

By SAW YAN NAING Thursday, February 14, 2008
http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=10392



General Secretary Mahn Sha (right) of KNU pictured with Gen Bo Mya at Karen Revolution Day in 2004. (Photo: Htain Linn)

Mahn Sha, the general secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU) was shot dead on Thursday afternoon at his home in Mae Sot, Thailand, according to KNU sources.

David Takapaw, the joint-secretary of the KNU, told The Irrawaddy on Thursday that Mahn Sha was shot by two unknown

gunmen on Thursday at about 4:30 p.m. in his home near the center of Mae Sot.

According to the only eyewitness, a Karen girl, the two men pulled up in front of the house in a black car. "The two men climbed the stairs of his home and said 'good evening' (in Karen language) to Mahn Sha."

"Then they shot him twice in the left side of his chest. He died immediately," the girl added.

Mahn Sha was general secretary of the KNU, which has faced serious internal conflicts since the death of its charismatic leader, Gen Saw Bo Mya, in December 2006.

Majoring in history at Rangoon University in 1962, Mahn Sha joined the Karen movement in the jungle at the Thai-Burmese border as soon as he finished his studies. He was seen as one of the leading lights in the KNU and was being groomed to take over the troubled KNU leadership. He was 64.

The KNU has been plagued with recent conflicts. Last year, Maj Gen Htain Maung, former leader of the KNU's 7th Brigade, signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese military regime. This was seen as yet another blow to KNU leaders who lost their fortified headquarters at Manerplaw to the Burmese army in 1995.

There have recently been several attacks and assassination attempts between mainstream KNU members and the breakaway 7th Brigade, now known as KNU/KNLA Peace Council.

Last month, Colonel Ler Moo, the son-in-law of breakaway leader Htain Maung, was killed in a bomb attack while sleeping at a communications office near the group's headquarters. He had earlier survived an assassination attempt in April 2007 while crossing the Moei River by boat.

Mahn Sha was involved in ceasefire talks with the Burmese military regime in the past. He was highly respected among both ethnic and Burman allies. The Burmese regime saw him as a strong leader in the KNU who repeatedly called for genuine political dialogue.

He is survived by two daughters and a son.

Reuters - February 15, 2008 -

Slain Myanmar rebel predicted rising tensions - Ed Cropley

THE BURMANET NEWS - February 15, 2008 Issue # 3403 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org> -www.burmanet.org

Only three days before he was shot dead in his home on the Thai border, a top Myanmar rebel leader predicted heightened tension with the ruling military junta in the run-up to a May constitutional referendum.

In an interview with Reuters on Monday, Karen National Union (KNU) secretary general Mahn Sha Lar Phan said the junta's plan to push through its army-drafted charter would meet opposition not just from the former Burma's many rebel groups.

"They will face many difficulties with this referendum, because people know this referendum will make them slaves," the soft-spoken 64-year-old said, sitting in the same wooden seat where he would be shot dead three days later.

Dissident groups are already campaigning for a "no" vote, saying the as yet unfinished charter is an attempt by the junta to legitimize its grip on power after 46 years of military rule.

Even though Mahn Sha's assassination could be the result of an internecine vendetta, the predominantly Christian KNU was quick to accuse Yangon's military regime of orchestrating the hit via a Buddhist Karen splinter group.

"This is the work of the DKBA and the Burmese soldiers," his son Hse Hse said, referring to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.

According to Mahn Sha's neighbor, the two gunmen spoke Karen, but Thailand-based Myanmar analyst Aung Naing Oo said it was impossible to know who was behind the killing.

The only certainty is that the Myanmar junta looks set to gain from the removal of a man central to the Karen cause.

"If this is from an internal Karen feud, it will trigger a bloodbath," Aung Naing Oo said.

The Karen, an ethnic minority of about 7 million people, have been fighting for independence since 1949, one of the world's longest-running guerrilla conflicts. They are one of only three rebel militias not to have signed a ceasefire with the junta.

There had been no contact between the KNU leadership, based on the Thai border, and Myanmar's generals for a year, Mahn Sha said, adding that there appeared to be little immediate prospect of peace. His death makes the chances even more remote.

"If the regime declared a nationwide ceasefire, there would be no need to fight," he said. "But now, we need to protect our people and to protect ourselves."

Having graduated from Rangoon University in 1966 with a degree in history, Mahn Sha threw himself into the Karen liberation movement, rising to become its secretary-general in 2000.

"His determination for freedom and democracy lives on within us and within the Karen people," his four children said in a statement issued by the Burma Campaign UK, an activist group.

"He did not live to see freedom for our people, but his dream will be fulfilled. The Karen, and all the people of Burma, will be free".

Myanmar has been under military rule of one form or another since 1962, during which time it has been riven by dozens of ethnic guerrilla wars, funded in large part by revenues from opium sales from the notorious "Golden Triangle".

(Editing by Darren Schuettler and Sanjeev Miglani)

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Burma's junta promises democracy, but most are wary

from the February 21, 2008 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0221/p01s04-woap.html>



Burmese hope: While many Burmese want economic and political change, they don't believe the government's plan for a constitutional referendum will usher in democratic reform.

Danna Harman

The government's surprise announcement to hold a constitutional referendum is being met with deep skepticism.

By **Danna Harman** | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Pakokku, Burma

The elderly monk is nervous. He paces the room, leans over an old TV set and slips in a "Tom and Jerry" DVD, raising the volume to an uncomfortable pitch. He peers out one window and then the next, fidgeting. He sits down, gets up again. Finally, he talks. But after all that, there is not much to say.

The Burmese military junta's surprise announcement last week that it would hold a referendum on the still secret Constitution this May, setting the stage for elections in 2010, is being greeted – in a country long used to broken promises and tricky maneuvers – mainly with suspicion.

Many say they are not holding out hope for a government-led transition to democracy. But nor do they believe a new outpouring into the streets is imminent. "Change," says the elderly monk, speaking anonymously for security reasons, "will take a long time in coming."

Dozens of interviews with monks and opposition members – both inside and outside Burma (Myanmar) – paint a picture of a nation suffering from a dire economic situation and at the tail end of its characteristic patience with the military government. But it's also a nation that feels it lacks both the means to rise up or a leader to guide a revolution.

The announcement marks the first time the government has set dates to carry out stages of its so-called road map to democracy. And the elections, if held, would be the first since 1990, when Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide. But the results of that vote were ignored by the junta, and the occasion was used to scrap the old Constitution and place Ms. Suu Kyi under house arrest, where she remains today – not a confidence inspiring precedent.

Meanwhile, the peaceful antigovernment marches in September, which began here, in Pakokku, a dusty town on the banks of the Irrawaddy River, and spread across the country, were effectively and brutally crushed by the military regime. At least 30 people were killed in those protests, according to United Nations estimates, and thousands were detained, including monks. Other monks were "de-robbed" or chased away from monasteries back to their villages. In Pakokku,

about a quarter of the monks have yet to return.

Since September, according to Amnesty International, arrests have continued, and the country's almost 2,000 political prisoners remain unreachable – even by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Its activities in Burma were curtailed after the organization complained last year of the practice of using detainees as forced labor for the military.

A government ruse?

"We were so excited in September. We thought we were winning. People were clapping on the sides of the road and giving us water. We felt we would be free," says Zaw Maung Oo, a young activist who marched in Rangoon. "But we failed."

The new government announcement, he says, is a ruse. "We all think this is just a fake-out, to reduce international pressure and try and reduce our anger," he says. He worries the military will use the time to see who comes out to object to their new Constitution – and crack down on them. The elections, he says, will either never take place or will be a sham. A draft of the Constitution guidelines, released last year, shows it will codify the military's role as the preeminent power in the country.

Mr. Maung Oo is not alone in his skepticism. While Singapore, which holds the chairmanship of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), welcomed the junta's announcement, saying it hoped it would result in "peaceful national reconciliation," others were less sanguine.

The 88 Generation Students, a coalition of leading Burmese democracy activists, branded the referendum a "declaration of war" against the people and warned the ruling junta could unleash a new wave of violence to ensure victory in a constitutional referendum. While the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, an exile group, called the regime "a mad man surrounded by fire" that is "plagued by economic woes, increasing international pressure, and widening public discontent at home," and so simply decided to convene a national referendum to divert attention.

Suu Kyi, who lives locked in her Rangoon home almost incommunicado with the outside world, was not able to make any comment herself. But her NLD party was not enthused, charging the announcement with being "vague, incomplete and strange."

September's dissent

While no one interviewed expects the regime to voluntarily change itself, there's also little faith in a repetition of the September events anytime soon. "Frankly speaking, the September uprisings happened with no real plan, thanks to a blunder of the junta," says U Han Than, an NLD spokesman, referring to the huge price hike in fuel prices that precipitated the street protests.

"But the generals proved again that they are very brutal and suppressive and that we are not strong enough to fight them. The people now know better than ever how determined the generals are to squash any expression of dissent," he says. "So they will not explode without real incitement."

"We are ready for compromise," insists Mr. Han Than. "We are not at war with the government. All we want is to express our opinion – but even that we are not allowed." Under international pressure, the junta recently agreed to send an envoy to hold talks with Suu Kyi, but these have been going nowhere. Last month she sent word to her party that no progress has been made.

And so, reluctantly, most Burmese are left with faith in the long term. "We have no faith in these passing pronouncements," says the head of a monastery in the ancient town of Sagaing, who spoke anonymously for security reasons. "In any case, if we got democracy today we would lose it the next day because we would not know what to do with it.... We have been 'de-educated.' "

Although Burma used to be famous in Southeast Asia for its quality education, today the situation is abysmal as half of its budget goes to the 400,000-strong military and less than 1 percent to education. According to the UN, 50 percent of children here do not finish primary school.

"We need to educate our next leaders and we need to educate the people to become critical thinkers so we can define what we want here," says the Sagaing monk. "Our strength will come from the confidence of being educated. That is when we will manage to turn to democracy. And for that we have years, maybe 10 to 20 to go."

Back in Pakokku, on the banks of the river, near the hawkers selling bags made out of watermelon seeds, an old lady sits beside a cage of sparrows. For 400 kyat, (about 30 cents) you can set a sparrow free, which, according to Buddhism, will bring you merit. She has an owl in a cage, too – freeing it will be an honor costing 1,000 kyat. But she has had no customers lately. "No freedom today," she says, but smiling, as is the Burmese way.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0221/p01s04-woap.htm>

REAL POLITICAL DILEMMAS - "BURMA DIGEST" <tayzathuria@gmail.com> Sa. (23.02.2008) 15:30:52

Burmese pro-democracy activists are in real dilemma now.

- If pro-democracy activists ask people to participate in the referendum to vote "NO" to regime's pro-military constitution, there are two possible outcomes: _

_ The "NO" vote may win and regime's pro-military constitution may be defeated.

(OR)

_ Regime may use tricks and rig votes and declare that they win, regardless of the real result. In that case, the participation by pro-democracy activists and people in the referendum may just give some credibility to regime's sham roadmap.

- If pro-democracy activists ask people NOT to participate in the referendum, there are also two possibilities: _

_ The boycott by pro-democracy activists and people will damage the credibility of regime's referendum

_ But, the boycott may give regime a chance to say "We gave you a fair chance to express your views in the referendum, but you failed to take the opportunity, and you have only yourself to blame!"

And here we must keep in mind that as soon as a new constitution takes effect, everything that happened prior to the new constitution may generally be, supposed to have been, wiped out slate-clean. It means that any previous election results may automatically expire once the new constitution has been approved by the referendum.

- And, if pro-democracy parties take part in new elections in 2010 there still are two possibilities: _

_ The pro-democracy parties may win the elections; but it may very likely be a fruitless or futile victory because 2008 constitution bars pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from being elected, and it gives 25% of seats in the parliament to military officers, and it states that the President must come from military background, and it allows military to veto any decisions by the parliament, and it gives permission to military to annex power at any time they want.

(OR)

_ The regime may use its lackey militant organizations like Kyant-phut or Swan-arr-shin to intimidate and to prevent people from voting for pro-democracy parties, delivering a de-facto defeat to the pro-democracy parties....

- If pro-democracy parties boycott 2010 elections, there are also two possibilities: _

_ The boycott by pro-democracy activists will damage the credibility of 2010 elections.

_ But, it will effectively clear the way for pro-regime lackey parties and military officers to control 100% of seats in the parliament.

So please give your opinion on how pro-democracy parties should, and could, respond to regime's referendum and election challenges.

You can write your opinion in the comment box on <http://burmadigest.info/2008/02/23/real-political-dilemma/> .

AFP - 28 February 2008 - "EBO" <burma@euro-burma.be> - 28.02.2008 19:38

Myanmar voters 'cannot accept' junta's charter: Suu Kyi's party

YANGON - THE party of Myanmar's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi said on Thursday that the junta's proposed constitution 'cannot be accepted by the people' when it goes to a referendum in May.

In its strongest statement yet on the referendum, the National League for Democracy (NLD) said the regime had drafted the constitution without consulting key representatives of the people.

'The one-sided text of the authorities can not only harm the national reconciliation process but also cannot be accepted by the people,' the party said in a written statement.

The NLD said most winners of the 1990 parliamentary elections had not participated in the drafting of the constitution.

The party also pointed to a conflict of interest by the regime for including many of the constitutional drafters on the new commission set up this week to oversee the referendum.

Supreme Court chief justice Aung Toe headed the panel that drafted the charter, and also heads the commission charged with organising the vote to approve it, the party said.

'That was against the advice and demands of international organisations, including the United Nations. All responsible

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persons should be included in the process of drafting the state constitution and the transformation of the nation,' the NLD said.

The junta still has not set an exact date for the referendum or released the final text of the document.

The United States has condemned the proposed charter and urged the regime to start from scratch on a new one. It has also tightened sanctions on the leadership and key business leaders.

AP - Posted: 2008-02-25 **US treasury Penalizes Junta Supporter** - ThaungN@aol.com - Montag 25.02.2008 - 19:00:57

Treasury Penalizes Myanmar Supporters By JEANNINE AVERSA

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Bush administration is clamping down on alleged financial operatives for the military-run government of Myanmar, as well as companies believed to be providing support for the regime.

The Treasury Department's action Monday covers Steven Law and his father, Lo Hsing Han, whom the department called "two key financial operatives" of the repressive junta in Myanmar, also know as Burma. The order also targets some companies in which the two are involved. Law's wife, Cecilia Ng, also is covered by the order.

The order also takes action against some businesses connected to Tay Za, described by the U.S. as a Myanmar business tycoon and arms dealer with close ties to Myanmar's military junta.

Any bank accounts or other financial assets found in the United States that belong to those named Monday must be frozen. Americans also are forbidden from doing business with them.

"Unless the ruling junta in Burma halts the violent oppression of its people, we will continue to target those like Steven Law who sustain it and who profit corruptly because of that support," said Stuart Levey, the department's under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

It marked the latest move by the administration to financially punish Myanmar's military-run government and its backers for a crackdown on pro-democracy protesters.

Asia World Co. Ltd, a major conglomerate in Myanmar, and its subsidiaries, Asia World Port Management, Asia World Industries Ltd and Asia World Light Ltd were covered by Monday's blocking order. Lo Hsing Han founded Asia World Co. Ltd in 1992, the department said. His son, Law, is the current managing director, the department said.

"Asia World has provided critical support to the Burmese regime and has received numerous lucrative government concessions, including the construction of ports, highways and government facilities," the department alleged.

Lo Hsing Han and his son have a history of involvement in illicit activities, the department alleged. Lo Hsing Han is known as the "Godfather of Heroin," the department said. Law joined his father's "drug empire in the 1990s and has since become one of the wealthiest individuals in Burma," the department said.

Treasury also targeted two hotel chains owned by Tay Za - Aureum Palace Hotels & Resorts and Myanmar Treasure Resorts.

The department also identified companies in Singapore owned by Ng, including Golden Aaron Pte. Ltd, "the property interests of which are now blocked," Treasury said.

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