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Junta Registers Political Party to Contest Election

Irrawaddy – 30 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein and other key members of the ruling junta have registered a political party to contest the upcoming general election.

State-run media reported on Thursday evening that Thein Sein and 26 other leaders had registered the party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), at the Union Election Commission earlier that day. The 26 other party leaders were not identified but are known to be current ministers and deputy ministers.

The registration of the USDP is the junta's first active entry into Burmese politics in two decades.

The new party's title appears to be derived from the name of the junta's mass organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

Thein Sein, junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe, and other key regime members such as Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, Gen Shwe Mann and Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo are members of the USDA Central Panel of Patrons. A further 25 ministers, deputy ministers and mayors are members of the USDA central executive committee and secretariat.

"USDA leaders except four patrons seem to have transformed the mass organization into a political party," said a USDA source in Rangoon, speaking on condition of anonymity. The USDA claims it has more than 24 million members across the country.

It is not clear whether Thein Sein and the 26 leaders of the new party will resign their current government positions.

If they fail to do so, they will transgress a key election law, Article 4 of the Political Party Registration Law, which bars any government staff from political party leadership.

State-run newspapers on Friday still described Thein Sein as prime minister and carried no news about possible resignations.

Political observers in Rangoon say they expect important news in coming days about new government appointments.

Friday's state-run newspapers reported that Thein Sein and Rangoon Mayor Aung Thein Lin attended the opening on Thursday of a cement factory in Thazi, near Mandalay, along with another key USDA leader Aung Thaung, the minister of Industry 1.

On Monday, Burma's war office ordered the retirement of Thein Sein and Aung Thein Lin from their military positions, along with 20 other senior officials.

Commenting on Friday on the registration of the USDP, Win Tin, a veteran leader of the opposition National League for Democracy, told *The Irrawaddy* the move represents an attempt by the junta to prolong its rule.

"Some said the election shows the military junta is preparing to withdraw from politics systematically, but what I see is that the generals are systematically trying to keep power with legitimacy," Win Tin said.

"Prime Minister Thein Sein's formation of a new party is a good example."

Suu Kyi fights party dissolution

AFP/DVB - 30 April 2010

Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi filed a lawsuit with Burma's Supreme Court Thursday in an attempt to prevent the dissolution of her party under a controversial new election law.

The detained pro-democracy icon's lawyer said two suits were submitted against the top junta leader Senior General Than Shwe, one on behalf of Suu Kyi herself and the other by her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The Nobel peace laureate asked the court to annul the part of the election law that would have forced the party to oust its detained leader in order to participate in the first polls to be held in two decades.

Instead, her party decided last month to boycott the elections, which are expected to be later this year. The NLD faces dissolution if it fails to re-register by 6 May.

In addition, the lawsuits asked for the formation of a parliament made up of lawmakers who won in 1990 elections, her lawyer Kyi Win told reporters.

The Supreme Court is expected to announce Friday whether it will accept the request to hear the matter, he said.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory in the 1990 polls, but the junta never allowed it to take office, and placed her under house arrest for 14 of the next 20 years.

Burma's new election law nullifies the result of the 1990 polls.

"You can't change the rules during the game," Kyi Win said of the new legislation. "We have to say these matters at the high court if we are allowed."

In February the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by Suu Kyi against her extended house arrest.

The 64-year-old opposition leader had her incarceration lengthened by 18 months in August after being convicted over a bizarre incident in which an American man swam to her lakeside home in Rangoon.

Critics dismiss the planned elections as a sham designed to entrench the power of the military which has ruled since 1962.

Burma's prime minister and 22 other ministers retired from their military posts this week, in a move seen as converting the leadership to civilian form ahead of elections due this year.

[Social work to go on without party's name, NLD says](#)

Mizzima - 30 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, will carry out social work among the people by officially registered with the authority concerned, but not in the party's name, the party's vice-chairman says.

National League for Democracy (NLD) vice-chairman Tin Oo told Mizzima the group would avoid using any name containing "NLD".

"We won't take names like Social Aid Group NLD or Legal Aid Group NLD. If we took such names ... the authority concerned would not accept [registration] by accusing us of conducting party activities under these names. It would be against the law," he said.

The party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting held at party headquarters in Bahan Township today passed the resolution. It was attended by all members except party general secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, and other sick members, chairman Aung Shwe and secretary U Lwin. Committee member Lun Tin was also absent.

"We need to be registered under the existing 'Associations Act' in Burma ... Even if we cannot register our work, we shall continue our work based on our own spirit and will", Tin Oo said.

NLD party has decided pulled out of the elections and said it would start social work after May 6 when the party expires as a legal entity under the new electoral laws.

But members at the CEC meeting on Monday had failed to reach a decision on whether the party's name would be used in future party social work.

Besides continuing social work assisting families of political prisoners, caring for HIV/Aids patients and providing legal aid for the redress of grievances; the party would assist other democratic forces, the party decided.

The party also decided to issue guiding directives to all party branches in States and Divisions on the party's stance.

"We instructed our party states and division branches against voluntarily lowering our party flags and removing party signboards. And we told them to pack our belongings and destroy unnecessary party documents, to keep all financial accounts according to law and to settle all accounts before the expiry date," Tin Oo said. "We also instructed them to settle [all matters] with the landlords of our party offices in a peaceful manner in accordance with local conditions at each and every branch."

There are more than 300 party branches in states, divisions and townships across Burma.

Hundreds Flee Threat of War in Shan State

Irrawaddy – 29 April 2010

By Saw Yan Naing

FANG, Thailand – Hundreds of ethnic Shan, Lahu, Chinese and Thai businesspeople, including some families of United Wa State Army (UWSA) personnel, have moved to the Thai-Burmese border area because they fear a serious flare-up of fighting between Burmese government troops and UWSA units based in southern Shan State.

Several thousand UWSA soldiers and their families live in southern Shan State opposite Fang District of Thailand's Chiang Mai Province. The UWSA, which has about 25,000 men in uniform, is under pressure from the Burmese regime to become a border guard force.

The departure of many local people to the relative safety of the Thai-Burmese border began in earnest on April 22, when a regime deadline ran out for the UWSA to agree to transform itself into a border guard force. Reports circulated that the Burmese army was planning to launch an offensive against UWSA units in southern Shan State.

Clashes already occurred between UWSA units and Burmese troops on April 23 and 24, according to Thai soldiers posted at Ang Khang hill, about 23 kilometers from the Fang District border with Shan State.

Following the clashes, Thai troops were deployed near Nor Leang village on the Thai-Burmese border, according to local residents.

The Thai army has also closed border trails in the Nor Leang area, fearing mortar shells could land on Thai territory.

Two local schools have also been closed and children moved to safety.

Some Chinese nationals living in southern Shan State have moved to Panghsang, the UWSA headquarters in northern Shan State. Some Thai nationals have also returned home, according to sources on the Thai-Burmese border.

Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese observer on the Sino-Burmese border said about 2,000 Chinese in southern Shan State had moved to northern Shan State to avoid a possible outbreak of hostilities.

Sources said some Wa families had sold their livestock, cars, motorcycles and other personal belongings for knockdown prices before moving to the border region opposite the Mae Ai District of Chiang Mai province.

The Thai army has urged ethnic Shan refugees at Khone Kyor camp in Wiang Haeng District to remain on alert, according to the camp committee. More than 600 refugees live at the camp.

A Shan refugee said: "The Thai army came to our camp and told us two days ago not to worry and that if we heard shooting they will come and pick us up in trucks and take us to a safe place if fighting occurs."

Maj Sai Lao Hseng, a spokesman for the Shan State Army (SSA-S), said some mortars had landed on Thai territory when fighting broke out between the SSA-South and Burmese government forces in 2003.

Sai Lao Hseng said the Burmese army probably shelled UWSA troops on April 23 and 24 by mistake, thinking they were SSA-S troops.

Residents in the area of the Burmese-Thai border town of Tachileik have also reportedly been moving to safety in Thailand.

Further north, in Kachin State, some people have been moving to China from Laiza, headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), fearing an outbreak of fighting there, according to a resident of Myitkyina.

Some had crossed into China with border pass permits and were staying with relatives in Yunnan Province, said one visitor.

Thai military authorities have warned that thousands of refugees will flee into Thailand if war breaks out in southern Shan State. An influx of drugs into Thailand's Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces is also highly expected, according to Pornthep Eamprapai, the director of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board in Chiang Mai.

About 30,000 people, including Chinese residents of the Kokang capital, Laogai, fled to China when Burmese government forces attacked the ethnic Kokang ceasefire group known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army in August 2009.

SPDC balks as April 28th deadline passes

IMNA – 29 April 2010

By Loa Htaw:

New Mon State Party (NMSP) leaders informed IMNA today that the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has opted to forgo its original April 28th deadline, the date on which the SPDC was expected to break its ceasefire agreements with all ethnic minority cease-fire groups who have thus far refused to convert their armed wings into government-run "militia groups".

"We still do not hear anything [from the SPDC]. It seems like they are prolonging the time [until breaking the ceasefires] and want the party [NMSP] to do as they want," said NMSP Vice-Chairman Nai Rot Sa.

"They want to keep the cease-fire agreements no less than us, but they also want us to follow their demands according to their constitution," reported a NMSP CEC leader, who asked not to be named.

This NMSP CEC member also reported to IMNA that all cease-fire groups, including the New Mon State Party (NMSP), The Shan State Army (SSA)- [North], the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), had informed the Burmese government by April 22nd of their refusals of the SPDC's "militia group" plans; NMSP communications with these groups has confirmed that all are still waiting for an official SPDC response, despite recent conflicts between SPDC battalions and the UWSA. Despite earlier government threats, each group's ceasefire has remained preserved, and none have yet been declared "illegal" under the 2008 constitution.

"I do not think they will attack all the cease-fire groups at once. It is possible they will attack one party at a time" he said.

"The authorities replied to the confirmation of the NMSP's report [regarding its militia group refusal] that our decision in the report was not clear enough, because we used diplomatic words in the report," he continued. "Of course our decision is clearly understood but the government is just pretending about not getting our message as we mean [it to be understood]".

"The government told us that we will talk again next time. We will keep the [present-ceasefire] relationship between the two sides and we can send back our members to stay at inside office as normal [away from NMSP-controlled territory]," he added

NMSP sources reported to IMNA that despite the SPDC's claims of its desire to preserve the ceasefire relationship it signed with the NMSP in the 1995, the party remains highly suspicious of the government's motives and will not cease its military preparations at party headquarters in Thaton, Tavoy, and Moulmein District; other ceasefire groups have allegedly adopted similar "wait and see" policies.

Rift between Junta and DKBA Deepens

Irrawaddy - 29 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

Tension between Burmese junta troops and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in Myawaddy township on the Thai-Burmese border has been mounting since the disagreement on border guard issues.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, a Karen source close to the DKBA in Myawaddy township said: "The majority of DKBA members don't want to lose the name of their organization. They are worried that without the DKBA name, there will be no political objective and no hope for a better future for ethnic Karen. This is why they don't want to transform their troops into a border guard force (BGF)."

A member of the DKBA said its spiritual leader, the influential abbot Ashin Thuzana, told DKBA leaders to keep their organization's name and not to accept the Burmese junta's BGF plan.

A DKBA officer at the Three Pagodas Pass told *The Irrawaddy*: "We will never betray our Karen people. We will keep our arms following our leader Saw Ba U Gyi's principles and we will fight for the freedom of our Karen people."

He said certain people involved in the border trade in Myawaddy who are close to the generals want the DKBA to join the BGF. While top leaders reject the BGF plan, young leaders agree to accept it.

DKBA troops in the Three Pagodas Pass area are on alert as tension has been mounting according to sources in the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

"Relations between them [Burmese junta troops and the DKBA] today are unlike anything before. They don't trust each other now," said Lawi Mon, a member of the NMSP.

Nai Tain, a Mon driver in Myawaddy township, said Burmese authorities have set up more checkpoints on the road between Myawaddy and Moulmein, inspecting all vehicles and travelers.

The authorities seized unlicensed cars—many such cars belong to DKBA members—entering Moulmein on Tuesday, he said, adding that this was part of the pressure junta authorities were putting on the DKBA.

The DKBA, which has been used by the military regime as a proxy force to combat insurgencies in Karen and Mon States, agreed to the BGF plan shortly it was announced in April, 2009.

However, when Ashin Thuzana announced his opposition to the plan in February, the group's leadership backed away from their original acceptance.

Ashin Thuzana, 68, the abbot of Myaing Gyi Ngu Monastery in Karen State, has long been active in the promotion of Buddhism in the area and has been responsible for the construction of several pagodas in Myaing Gyi Ngu.

He was reportedly admitted to hospital in Bangkok for treatment of a long-standing lung problem early in February. Burmese military officials reportedly offered to admit him to a military hospital in Rangoon, but he chose a private clinic in the Thai capital.

The DKBA, which was formed 15 years ago, now controls most of the Thai-Burmese border area previously controlled by the Karen National Union.

It claims to have 6,000 troops and plans to enlarge its army to 9,000, making it Burma's second largest non-state armed group. It has been accused of human rights abuses in its clashes with KNU forces and also of involvement in human trafficking along Thai-Burmese border.

The Burmese junta has put pressure on all the ethnic cease-fire groups in Burma to transform their troops into BGF battalions since last year, making April 22 the most recent deadline for acceptance. Many of the groups remain defiant, refusing to accept the plan, however.

MNLA gears up for conflict

IMNA – 29 April 2010

IMNA has received reports that New Mon State Party (NMSP) leaders at headquarters in Moulmein District, Tavoy District, and Thaton District are ordering retired Mon National Liberation Army soldiers in each district out of retirement, with the aim of bolstering the force's numbers in preparation for a potential conflict with the Burmese army.

MNLA preparations reportedly began immediately after NMSP leaders announced that the party had refused to turn the MNLA into a government-controlled "people's militia group" or "Border Guard Force", despite threats from the State Peace and Development Council) SPDC commanders that such a move would end the 15-year ceasefire agreement between the two parties.

NMSP leaders reportedly ordered retired MNLA members to return to their headquarters by April 28th, the date by which the SPDC's Southeast Command was expected to release the Burmese government's response to the NMSP's refusal. Despite widespread speculation, however, the Southeast Command has yet to respond in any conclusively violent manner to the news.

A NMSP member in Moulmein told IMNA, "They [the NMSP] called their old army members to go back into their battalions and ordered their members to be prepared for fighting, if the SPDC enter their areas [in Moulmein, Tavoy or Thaton Districts]".

According to IMNA's field reporters, newly un-retired MNLA soldiers at all three districts' offices have been seen performing military drills, donning official MNLA uniforms, and standing sentry duty around district offices.

A second Moulmein-based NMSP member told IMNA, "We had known that army members would be called back [to party headquarters], but we did not know that it would happen so fast."

NMSP spokesman Nai Chay Mon reported IMNA during the party's press conference on April 22nd that party members living with their families near NMSP offices in party-controlled territory have begun to move to safer locations, and that MNLA battalions are expected to "defend themselves" if provoked by the Burmese military.

When IMNA wrote on concerns over SPDC pressure on the `BGF issue on September 10th, 2009, the party's website reported that the MNLA force comprised of roughly 350 members, down from 7860 at the time of the party's ceasefire agreement in 1995. Current MNLA numbers are unavailable, but membership is expected to rise dramatically due to rise due to the recent recruitment of retired members.

USDA Abolishes Township Committees in Arakan

Narinjara News – 30 April 2010

Maungdaw: The USDA township committees throughout Arakan State were abolished by high authorities after the organization converted to a political party to contest the upcoming election, said a close source to USDA officials in Maungdaw on the western Burmese border.

"They intend to form new committees with new members of the USDA for the election, so the authority abolished all the current township committees in Arakan State," the source said.

In Arakan State, there are 17 townships and the committees in all townships have become inactive in the restructuring.

"The USDA authority has abolished all township committees not only in Arakan State but also in other parts of Burma to form new committees with well known and respected members, including businessmen, educated people, and retired government officials," the source added.

A friend of U Khin Maung, who was secretary of the Maungdaw Township USDA confirmed with Narinjara over the phone that U Khin Maung is no longer the USDA secretary in the township, and has become an ordinary member, adding that "he is unable to be selected as secretary of Maungdaw Township again because he is a government serviceman."

The USDA township committees are likely to be reformed with respected members who are not government officials or civil servants, in order to gain votes in the upcoming election. The USDA has been recruiting many worthy people, including retired officials who are well educated, and other respected people from the village to township level.

However, the authority has not abolished the district-level committees nor the division and state-level committees.

The USDA party has applied with the Election Commission under Prime Minister U Thein Sein, now a former Lieutenant General, to run in the election. The move came after 23 ministers in the Burmese regime's cabinet resigned from their military posts last Monday.

India to flush out northeast rebels from Burma

Khonumthung News - 30 April 2010

In the wake of its drive against Northeast India insurgent groups, the Indian Army has blocked all the foot roads on the Indo-Myanmar border from April 20. The rebels are expected to be flushed out from Burma by the military junta.

"No one is allowed to use the border foot roads. Indian troops are being stationed throughout the border areas over two weeks," said a local in Aichin village, Tonzang township in Chin state.

Meanwhile, Burmese soldiers are patrolling the Indo-Myanmar border areas like – Hnahlan, Haichin, Aichin and other villages in Tonzang Township.

"Burmese military personnel are still patrolling the border areas. They are not ordinary soldiers, but are known as border defence troops of the military junta," he added.

India's northeast insurgent groups are said to be very active in Tonzang Township, northern Chin state in Burma.

"The rebel groups continue to be active in our areas like before. There is no change though the border roads are blocked by Indian soldiers," said a local.

Following an agreement between the Indian government and the Burmese junta, preparations are afoot for a joint military operation in Indo-Myanmar border areas to flush out Indian insurgents. The agreement between the two governments was reached following high level visits from the Indian side.

The Indian government authorities have already warned the Chin National Front, the Chin ethnic armed group, to stay clear of the flush out operation.-

Migrants lose money, peace of mind in Thai protests

Mizzima - 29 April 2010

By Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai – Migrant workers who work near the sites of now six-week old political protests in Bangkok have suffered financial losses and raised stress levels by security restrictions from both government security officials and the anti-government "red-shirt" demonstrators.

International Rescue Committee advocacy officer Adisorn Kerdmongkol told Mizzima the majority of migrant workers in Bangkok were not directly affected by the protests but that they were obstructed from work and feared travelling around the city, especially near the main demonstration site at the Ratchaprasong intersection in the city's biggest shopping district. Mr. Adisorn works closely with migrants from Thailand's neighbours.

“There is a migrant learning centre near the demonstration area but workers can’t attend classes and fear leaving their accommodations,” he said.

Mr. Adisorn said migrants workers just want to work in Thailand and want to stay away from the unrest as they were aware of government concerns about migrants taking part in protests.

Since the demonstration started last month, the authorities have urged employers of migrant workers to monitor their employees to ensure they refrain from joining political movements after claims by security officials that some groups have brought in migrant workers to fill their ranks.

The Ministry of Labour also warned migrant workers that if officials found them participating in internal political movements their temporary permission to live in Thailand would be revoked.

Wanchai, an ethnic-Mon worker in a small restaurant near Ratchaprasong said the several checkpoints set up by officials made it difficult for him to travel to work. “Even though I have a work permit they asked many questions that made me scared,” he said.

He could continue to work, he said, but a number of construction labourers in the area had to stop work because they were prevented from taking tools and equipment to building sites.

“It made them worried because they are losing pay, which is handed out on a daily basis. The violence also made us worried about safety,” he said.

Red-shirts demonstrators had also set up checkpoints and barricades on streets leading to the protest sites to screen people and protect themselves from other groups, the police and the army.

According to Ministry of Labour estimates, 200,000 migrants mainly from Burma work in Bangkok.

However, the political turmoil has spread to several other provinces.

A Shan construction worker in Chiang Mai said police had stepped up inspections of trucks that carry them to work on construction sites.

“Many of us who don’t have work documents are scared to leave home because the restrictions are greater,” the Shan worker said.

Officials have increased restrictions on people’s movements and weapons searches after several bomb attacks in crowded places, including a department store and outside the Chiang Mai Administrative Court this month.

The ministry said it would support small-to-large enterprises in the business sector and aid at least 20,000 workers affected by the crisis, with relief funds to compensate those laid off or who have suffered wage cuts.

29/04/2010

News

[Burmese junta ‘politicising post-Nargis aid’](#)

DVB - 29 April 2010

By Joseph Allchin

The New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) today warned at the launched of a report that aid workers inside Burma were still “feeling the brunt of continued repression” by the junta, two years after cyclone Nargis.

The report was launched ahead of the two-year anniversary of the cyclone, which struck southern Burma on 2 May, leaving 140,000 people dead and severely affecting 2.4 million. The report, ‘I Want to Help My Own People’, is based on 135 interviews with survivors, aid workers and eye-witnesses.

Elaine Pearson, deputy director of HRW Asia, said that while it is clear that more aid is required for Burma, the junta remained overly restrictive towards aid workers in the cyclone-stricken Irrawaddy delta.

She further noted that Burma was an “impoverished mess” following the cyclone and that there was a serious budget shortfall when it came to aid. Moreover, the junta is spending too little on social welfare concerns, such as health and education, whilst spending 40 percent of the government budget on the military, and failing to invest the massive revenues made from natural gas into such humanitarian projects.

The military's initial response to the cyclone was heavily criticised after they blocked foreign aid from entering the country, often citing fears of a foreign invasion.

HRW's Burma analyst, David Mathieson, noted two years on however that: “Burmese civil society saved the day”, and he renewed calls for the release of political prisoners “in the strongest terms”, with around 20 Nargis recovery workers currently in jail.

Successes were noted however as HRW found that the agriculture sector had shown signs of recovery and that, after massive international pressure, an “unprecedented influx of humanitarian assistance”. Mathieson said however that progress and successes of the aid-coordinating Tripartite Core Group, made up of the UN, ASEAN and the Burmese government, “should not excuse the disgraceful actions of the junta”.

The scale of needs was found to be large due to years of neglect by the ruling junta. “The humanitarian needs of Burma's people for food, clean water, and basic healthcare are immense because the military government has for so long mismanaged the economy,” said Pearson.

It was also found that the military were more concerned with their “sham political process”, as Pearson called the run-up to this year's election, than with aid and distribution supposedly used for political ends.

Mathieson noted also that “the [pro-government] USDA had a major role in pretending to have a major role helping out” after the cyclone, “whilst food supplies were dangled as an incentive to vote yes,” in the 2008 constitution referendum. The constitution was rushed through in the days following the cyclone, and showed “how callous the regime really is – the vote was more important than helping the people”.

These calls came after concerns emerged last month that donor agencies from Europe were having problems due to EU sanctions on the junta, which had at times allegedly prevented agencies from purchasing commodities such as timber. A press notice from the UK parliament noted that “aid efforts have stalled”.

[New Mon State Party prepares for war](#)

Mizzima - 29 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai - The New Mon State Party is making preparations in case war breaks out between it and the Burmese Army, after its militia under ceasefire rejected the junta's order for it to be brought under the command of the Border Guard Force, a spokesman said.

The junta had given the party until April 22 to respond to its offer of a place for the party's militia in the new guard force. The party rejected the offer and since has secured all documents from its communication offices and ceased their operations except for those in Moulmein, in preparation for a crackdown, party spokesman Naing Chay Mon said.

“We answered the junta at the deadline on April 22 that we could not accept their proposal. So, we have closed the offices so that if the junta takes action against our organisation, most of our members will not be left in the area,” he said.

He said Rangoon, Ye Township, Myawaddy Township, Three Pagodas Pass and Than Phyu Za Yap offices have been closed, and only two staff members are left in charge at Moulmein, capital of Mon State.

The party agreed to a ceasefire with the junta in 1995, after which the offices were opened for bilateral communications with the government. Its rights to do business were revoked, so the party had no concerns about economic loss from the closures, former party member Naing Tin Aung said.

"We had invested heavily in timber businesses. Later [some years after the ceasefire], the government revoked our permits to conduct those businesses. So, we have nothing to lose from the closures," he said.

After initial years of ceasefire, the party also ran bus lines and import-export businesses but those permits were also revoked later by the regime.

Tension was building between the junta and the New Mon State Party and both sides were preparing for possible armed clashes, political analyst Aung Thu Nyein in Thailand said.

The junta has three military units and one military operations command centre at Ye.

It also has three units at Three Pagodas Pass, the South Eastern Command is at Moulmein, and many military units are positioned between Moulmein and Mu Done Township.

About 700 soldiers from the party control all or parts of the following areas: Moulmein District, Tavoy District, Tha Htone District, Bahoquin at the top of Ye stream and Three Pagodas Pass.

Sources said that more than 400 villagers from Toehaparouk, Ani, Chelltike, Waisin and Naungbwaie in Ye Township had fled to the Hlokhani Mon refugee camp on the Thai-Burmese border on April 25 because the worry about war.

Mon separatists formed the Mon Peoples Front, which was later superseded by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in 1962. Since 1949, the eastern hills of the state (as well as portions of Thaninthaya Division) have been under control of the NMSP.

The NMSP was formed in 1958 and they continued the for self-determination and the rights of other ethnic minorities.

Many Mon were against the 1995 ceasefire agreement, but the NMSP convinced them to try a political compromise with the regime. In 2003, the party joined the national constitutional convention, where it proposed that the junta create a federal union of Burma. The junta turned down the proposal, and in 2007 the party sent only observers to the convention. NMSP leaders say the 2008 constitution is undemocratic, allowing for no ethnic rights.

[Shan rebel leader warns Burma army](#)

SHAN - 28 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

Due to military junta's one sided policy to convert all ceasefire groups into forces run by its Army, large-scale civil war can break out again, said Lt-Gen Yawdserk, leader of the anti-Naypyitaw Shan State Army (SSA) 'South'.

In addition, using military measures against the ethnic ceasefire groups is not the right resolution. It only means creating crisis, he said.

"The reason that the ceasefire groups concluded ceasefire is because they wanted to solve the problems politically. But so far they have never been able to conduct any political dialogue and only have been forced by the military to do the way it wants."

Many ceasefire groups: the United Wa State Army (UWSA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and Shan State Army (SSA) 'North' concluded their armed struggle in 1989 in order to make peace with the military junta. (The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) concluded the ceasefire pact in 1995.)

But now all were only required by the military junta to transform themselves into the junta run forces known as Border Guard Forces (BGF) before its general elections. If the groups fail to comply with, the

military junta will launch military operations against the groups and will recognize them as outlaw associations.

Lt-Gen Yawdserk said, "If it is a political issue, then it must be solved politically, not by using force," he said. "But now it is threatening not only the groups, but also local people. It means it doesn't care for the people and ethnic rights."

He calls for all ceasefire groups to be more united and to keep fighting for their genuine aspirations. If not all their lands and properties will fall into the military junta's hands. "If you [ceasefire groups] accept the military's BGF program, then what you have been fighting for years will come to nothing. And it will be difficult for you gain the people's support and their trust again."

He also urges people not to leave their motherland and home whatever comes.

Lt-Gen Yawdserk is the founder of the Shan State Army (SSA) 'South', established in 1996, after he escaped with 300 men from the Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA), and remain the principal armed opposition movement still fighting against Burma's military rulers.

[Karen army takes blame for grenade attack](#)

DVB – 28 April 2010

By Naw Noreen

One of Burma's biggest ethnic armies, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), has claimed responsibility for Tuesday's grenade attack on a hydropower plant in eastern Burma's Karenni state.

The [attack on the Thaukyegat plant](#), run by the Asian World Corporation, injured four workers. Saw Mae Ae Sein, commander of KNLA Brigade 2, said that an elite unit was yesterday sent to the dam site to carry out the attack.

The dam, currently under construction, has typically caused controversy and led to a militarisation of the surrounding area as the army looks to secure swathes of land for the project.

"There are concerns for the local's survival; locals have been facing threats of shootings, oppression, forced labour, torture and forced relocation," he said.

He added that the Karen army, which has been waging a 60-year civil war against the Burmese government, "had to strike because if we didn't, the district would not survive."

Troops from the 10,000-strong KNLA launched rockets and heavy weapons at the dam site, while the Burmese army returned fire. The fight last for about an hour, Saw Mae Ae Sein said.

"There were no casualties on our side but there were some on the government side, as well as some damage to their buildings."

He said that the KNLA had not intended to injure civilians, "but militarily, it was unavoidable as they were at the site working for the government. Besides, it was likely that they were just people handpicked by the government to work at the site."

Construction on Thaukyegat hydropower project begun in 2003. Saw Mae Ae Sein said that around 30 villages and nearly 100,000 people will be impacted by the dam.

Asia World Corporation came under attack earlier this month close to the site of another controversial dam in Burma's northernmost Kachin state. [Three bombs exploded](#) inside the company's compound close to the Myitsone dam, 18 miles north of the Kachin state capital, Myitkyina. Four Asia World employees were killed.

[Junta uses people's militia to monitor KIA](#)

KNG - 29 April 2010

The 4th brigade of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) based in Northeast Shan State, is being closely monitored by the Burmese Army using the people's militia, said a resident.

Burmese troops are on the lookout for two battalions of the Loikang-based KIA's 4th brigade which moved a few days ago. It is using the people militia for surveillance, the local added.

"Over two days, they (junta) have been searching for the two KIA battalions, Hpawng Seng, Pang sai and Munggu (Mongkoe) villages with the help of people's militia," said the resident.

Tension between the Burmese military junta and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the political-wing of KIA has mounted since the Kachin ethnic armed group rejected the Border Guard Force (BGF) proposal by the regime after the April 22 deadline given by the junta.

"KIO/A will not attack the Burmese troops but if they continue to search and find us there will be clashes," he said.

There are four battalions-- No. 2, No. 8, No.9 and No.17 under the command of the KIA's 4th brigade. Last year, the junta pressurized the brigade by giving two options of transforming into three militia groups and withdrawing all battalions to Kachin State. KIA rejected it.

KIA refused the junta's proposal because the state is historically important for the ethnic armed group. The KIO was formed in October 25, 1960 and its armed wing KIA was set up in February 5, 1961 near Lashio in Northeast Shan State.

"They (junta) are sending more troops near the 4th brigade, where it can reach in 20 minutes by foot," said the local source. The Burmese Army has ordered militias, formed forcibly with local people to take positions around the 4th brigade.

"KIA may have little chance to defend their camp if the Burmese Army attacks their 4th brigade because it has reinforced troops," said the resident.

The junta is organizing people's militia with local people by force mainly to send them to the front lines if they take on KIA.

"No one wants to join the militia because they don't want to fight their own people. If there is battle they will run," said the local.

Most members of militias are Kachin ethnics and they could not escape the junta's dragnet because of fear of reprisal and some are joining for their own business interests, said the villager.

PM and cabinet ministers resign from military posts

Mizzima - 28 April 2010

By Ko Wild

Chiang Mai – Twenty-two of the junta's cabinet ministers including Prime Minister Thein Sein resigned from their military posts this week, in what is seen by observers as paving the way for them to join the new "civilian" government.

Sources close to the authorities told Mizzima that the list included Agriculture and Irrigation Minister Major General Htay Oo (General Secretary of Union Solidarity and Development Association – USDA); Rail Transport Minister Major General Aung Min; Commerce Minister Brigadier General Tin Naing Thein; No. 1 Electrical Power Minister Colonel Zaw Min; No.2, Major General Khin Maung Myint; and Deputy Home Minister Brigadier General Phone Swe.

Though the junta failed to officially announce the resignations, today's issues of state-run papers first referred to the prime minister as U Thein Sein, omitting his former military rank of general. "U" is the equivalent of Mr. in Burmese.

Opposition activists and political observers see the resignations as a sign the ministers are set to run in upcoming elections to seats in the new "civilian government". They predicted that the ministers would soon start campaigning openly.

A military source said that another batch of military officers of remaining ministers and deputy ministers would soon resign from their military posts.

Opposition groups and critics said the junta was using the polls to ensure a favourable outcome in the polls and maintain a tight grip on power. As per the 2008 constitution, 25 per cent of seats are reserved for military personnel in all legislatures, namely the People's Parliament (lower house), the National Parliament (upper house), and the States and Regions Parliament (state assembly).

The act of resigning from military posts means they will not be included in the 25 per cent quota.

The as yet undated polls will be the first since those of 1990, which were won in a massive landslide by the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

New Political Parties' Biggest Challenge: Money

Irrawaddy – 28 April 2010

By Htet Aung

Burma's political landscape ahead of the 2010 election is gradually reshaping itself with more new political parties registering to contest as older parties fade away.

Only four of the existing 10 political parties have re-registered as a political parties.

So far, 25 political parties have registered with the Union Election Commission, which has approved five parties. Of the 25 parties, 15 are ethnic national parties.

At the very beginning, most of the new parties will face the task of raising campaign funds and other necessary resources to create a party infrastructure, pay candidate nomination fees and cover the cost of actual campaigning, in some cases over wide areas of the country.

Despite their claims that they will contest the election nationwide, some political parties still lack a strategic plan to raise necessary funds and have even expressed concerns about financing campaigns even in a limited number of constituencies.

Some of the parties expressing such concerns are the Union Democratic Party, National Political Alliances, Democratic Party (Myanmar), Peace and Diversity Party and Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar).

"We know some businessmen are willing to donate money to our party, but they are afraid to have a relation with a political party," Shwe Ohn, an 88-year-old veteran Shan politician and founding leader of the Union Democratic Party told *The Irrawaddy*. "For now, it's difficult to know the number of the constituencies that we will contest due to costs."

Asked if his party will form a business to raise funds, as permitted by the election laws, he said: "How can we set up a party business? We have zero investment."

Article 15 of Political Parties Registration Law permits political parties to raise party funds either through "donations in cash or kind from the official income of an individual or organization, a company or a group of companies owned by Burmese Nationalities" or "the official income and profits of the businesses owned by the party."

The political repression in Burma under the military junta during the past 20 years is still a nightmare for the general public, especially businessmen, because they have seen the junta's harassment, intimidation and even destruction of businesses that were involved in supporting opposition political groups.

Observers say that as long as such fear is deeply rooted in society, it will be hard to make a U-turn in the people's mindset that would allow them to get involved in politics by donating funds.

On the other hand, without donations some political parties can't afford the set-up costs for party headquarters and branch offices.

However, some parties are making inroads: "A reporter from *Pyay Myanmar* [a local news journal] asked me recently whether I received financial assistance from the government, which they heard has a plan to

do so," said Ohn Lwin, a leader of National Political Alliances. "I don't know, but we are seeking our own funds. One fertilizer distribution company supports us, and we plan to get a sale contract from the company to distribute fertilizers in Irrawaddy Delta and the profits will go to the party fund."

Members of the Peace and Diversity Party (PDP) said they seek cost-cutting wherever they can find it.

"The country is poor and we are poor, too," said Nyo Min Lwin, the chairman of the PDP based in Rangoon. "We stepped into politics because we are not satisfied with the current situation and what we really have is just political will. Therefore, to reduce the costs, we use Internet technology for political activities such as meetings, discussions and sharing information."

Nay Myo Wai, PDP secretary, has a web blog where he posted the party's constitution.

Nyo Min Lwin said his party will contest the election nationwide, but currently they have opened only one office, at party's headquarters which is located in Nay Myo Wai's house in Htauk Kyant on the outskirts of Rangoon.

Meanwhile, the junta's Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein and about 20 other ministers have resigned their military posts to take on leading roles in a new junta-backed political party and contest in the election.

The Union Solidarity and Development Association, which claims a membership of more than 24 million people, will be a backbone of the junta's new political party. Moreover, the junta's economic arms such as Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Ltd. (UMEHL) is likely to be a financial ally for the pro-junta party, although election laws stipulate that parties may not receive funds from the government.

"In 2007, UMEHL had an authorized capital of 40,000 million kyats (US \$40 million) and an allotted capital of 39,000 (\$39 million)," said Maung Aung Myo in his book "*Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948*," published in 2009.

The National Unity Party (NUP), transformed from the former ruling socialist party called the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), is expected to be the second strongest party in terms of funding.

In a recent interview, Han Shwe, an NUP executive committee member, said that he expects to field more than 200 candidates in the election, and the party has funds to cover the cost of candidate fees.

Each candidate must pay a 500,000 kyat (\$500) non-refundable deposit. For more than 200 candidates, the fees would total 100 million kyat (\$100,000).

In the 1990 election, the National League for Democracy (NLD) faced a shortage of campaign funds and its supporters were afraid to donate money to the party for fear of government reprisals, while, its strongest competitor, the NUP, had access to vehicles and venues which were controlled by the former socialist government.

With the absence of the NLD, there is no strong opposition party to compete against junta-backed parties.

That factor, coupled with the disparity between funding sources for regime-backed parties and middle and smaller political parties, ensures that the election is tilted in favor of the military regime.

[Burmese get a whiff of UK elections](#)

DVB – 29 April 2010

By Francis Wade

The furore surrounding Gordon Brown's "bigoted woman" slip-up and Nick Clegg's rise from the ashes to stardom are all being beamed at Burma's young voters as part of a BBC 'connecting' initiative.

With Burma due this year hold its first elections since 1990, and the UK heading to the polls in a week's time, the BBC Burmese service has said it is "specifically [targeting] Burma's young people who have never voted".

Although critics have derided the Burmese elections as a sham, some observers say that any window of opportunity for change in the country, however slight, should be exploited. Burma has been ruled by a military dictatorship since 1962.

"The BBC Burmese journalists report on the UK parliamentary system, the relationship between the UK government and the opposition parties, why people vote and whether they vote for the personality or for electoral platform," it said.

Much of this however will fall flat on Burmese ears, given the ruling junta's success in blocking any viable opposition from running for office. The National League for Democracy party, headed by imprisoned Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, was forced to boycott the elections after laws were announced which prevented Suu Kyi from participating.

The BBC is one of only three non-state television broadcasters in Burma, along with Voice of America (VOA) and DVB; around 10 million people tune into DVB's radio and television broadcasts each day.

The 32-language BBC World Service, of which BBC Burmese is one, says that it has "mounted extensive programming, making the connection between the UK's key political event on the one hand, and the lives of people around the world on the other".

"The international broadcaster is placing UK election 2010 in the context of the issues relevant and important to its audience across platforms, across languages, across regions."

The director of BBC Global News also noted that international audiences will want to "discuss and debate the impact the UK votes may have on their lives". While the UK's sporadic criticism of the Burmese government is often drowned out by vociferous berating from Washington, Britain maintains strict sanctions on the Burmese generals and provides funding for aid groups along the Thai-Burma border.

Many Central Asian and Arabic countries are also being targeted by the initiative, which includes "a look at how the elections work in a Western democracy, how the opposition functions, what are the forces influencing UK politics and politicians," and more.

Burma has one of the world's harshest media environments, and regularly imprisons journalists deemed guilty of dissent against the ruling junta. Non-state media workers are viewed as the 'third pillar' in the pro-democracy movement; the apparent threat they pose to the junta's grip on power is epitomised by the 14 now serving jail sentences, some as long as 35 years.

[USDA Membership Cards Useless for Muslims' Travel](#)

Narinjara News – 29 April 2010

By Takaloo, Maungdaw: The membership cards issued by the Union Solidarity and Development Association can not be used as a travel document by Muslim members as guaranteed by the association during its campaign to expand in Muslim villages in northern Arakan State, said Hafezul Rahman, a USDA member, on Tuesday.

"We were told during the campaign that the USDA is the strongest and biggest organization in Burma, and we would have the right to travel freely across Arakan with the USDA membership card. But it is practically impossible for us to travel from one Nasaka area to another even our own Maungdaw Township with that card," he said.

The Muslim people in northern Arakan, known as Rohingya in the international communities, have been confined to their own locales for nearly two decades by strict travel restrictions known as the regional Muslim laws that have been imposed by the current military regime.

Muslims who wish to travel from their location of residence to another place have to apply for approval of immigration or Nasaka authorities and must pay anywhere from 1,500 to 40,000 kyat. Any person who travels without permission is arrested and jailed from six months to one year by military authorities.

"What the USDA guaranteed in their canvassing campaign was just wooing to get support from the Muslim communities," he said. However, he added that when he was traveling from his home to nearby Buthidaung Town recently, he was sent away from the Nasaka check post at the Three-Mile Tunnel without being arrested for traveling without permission after he showed his USDA membership card.

According to other Muslim villagers, the USDA has since mid-2009 been recruiting new members with propaganda promising full citizen rights, but has mostly used force and threats of confiscating their property in Buthidaung and Maungdaw Townships.

The USDA has already formed village units comprised of 15 to 30 members in each village in the two northern townships.

Members are being provided with membership cards that list their ethnicity and religion as either Myanmar/Muslim or Rakhine/Muslim, the same as their white temporary citizen cards, which declare on the back, "by this card the bearer cannot claim citizenship of any country."

Sources in Maungdaw told Narinjara that Deputy Home Minister Brigadier General Phone Swe held meetings with government officials, USDA members, and local Muslim residents during his visit from Rangoon to Buthidaung and Maungdaw along with some prominent Muslim businessmen.

Phone Swe, in his meetings with local residents urged them to vote for the "lion marker", which is the logo of the USDA for the upcoming election.

News has been spreading in the Muslim dominated townships near Bangladesh that four prominent Muslim businessmen, who are close associates of the regime's generals, will stand as USDA candidates in the two townships in the upcoming election.

Dr. Bashir and Htay Win are said to have been nominated to run for the Buthidaung constituencies, while Aung Zaw Win and Aung Naing will run in the Maungdaw constituencies.

In a similar manner, the National Unity Party, NUP, formerly known as the Burmese Socialist Programme Party, have been launching campaigns to recruit members and canvass for votes among the Muslim communities in Buthidaung and Maungdaw Township since the beginning of this year.

Both the USDA and NUP, according to observers, are being backed by the Burmese regime. Their recruitment activities and canvassing are flouting the political party registration laws recently declared by the Union Election Commission, as they have not yet registered and approved as political parties with the commission.

According to state-run media, only five out of 19 applicant parties have been approved by the Election Commission to form political parties. The 88 Generation Student and Youths (Union of Myanmar), the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, the PaO National Organization, the Taaung National Party, and the Wunthanu NLD, have been approved to form parties.

The Arakan League for Democracy, the party that won the third-most votes in Arakan State in the 1990 election in Burma, has declared they will boycott the election, claiming that the constitution drafted by the ruling regime has no democratic rights for ethnic minorities and is designed to entrench military rule.

[Election Commission offices \(set up\) in Chin state](#)

Khonumthung News - 28 April 2010

Offices of the Election Commission for the forthcoming general elections in Burma are being set up in various townships in Chin state under the tutelage of the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC).

There are 15 members in each Election Commission in the townships of Chin state. The members are prominent citizens and retired government employees.

In Hakha Township, Mr. Bawi Hoe, retired District Education Director, is acting as the Chairman of the Election Commission. The General Secretary is the district general commander and others are retired persons, said Mr. Van Lian, the Chairman of NLD.

In Falam township Mr. Saliangkap is the chairman and the secretary is the district general commander. The rest are six locals and seven government employees.

Similarly, in Teddim Township and Thantlang Township retired people and prominent citizens are in the Election Commission, Mr. Thangdolian told *Khonumthung News*.

Meanwhile, in Matupi Township the Election Commission is gearing up to work at the village and block level.

28/04/2010

News

[Win Tin unhappy over EU parleys with junta](#)

Mizzima - 28 April 2010

By Ko Wild

Chiang Mai - Though European Union's extension of its existing economic sanctions against Burma for one more year was welcomed by the National League for Democracy (NLD), Win Tin, a senior leader was unhappy with its decision to continue parleys with the junta.

"When we wanted them to apply more pressure on the junta, they still wanted to talk with the regime. We are unhappy with this," Win Tin a Central Executive Committee member of NLD said.

Given that the appalling human rights situation has not shown any improvement, European Union foreign ministers decided to extend sanctions against military-ruled Burma for one more year at a meeting in Luxemburg on April 26. At the same time the meeting decided to send a diplomatic mission to Burma for parleys with the junta.

Western countries should persuade veto power holders like China and Russia to take practical actions on Burma through the United Nations Security Council, such as weapons sanctions and strong diplomatic pressure, Win Tin said.

EU had imposed sanctions against Burma since 1996. These include, ban on sale of weapons to Burma, halt to visas for regime officials, their families and their cronies so that they are unable to visit EU countries, stopping aid, except humanitarian aid, sealing bank accounts of Burmese military officials, and restricted diplomatic relations with Burma.

The judges, who initiated legal action against Aung San Suu Kyi were added to the sanction list last year. EU has also called for the unconditional release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

However, the chairman of the Union of Myanmar National Political Force, Aye Lwin, who has opposed sanctions by western countries, since 2006, said it is impractical.

"The sanction is a negative approach, where it ignores the political, economical and social opportunities of Burmese people while we proceed towards democracy", he told Mizzima.

He pointed out that the EU had said the junta's electoral laws cannot ensure free and fair election, because the NLD and its allies among ethnic parties did not like the electoral laws.

Sanctions affect not only the junta but also the people, so they should revoke the sanction to sympathize with the Burmese people, Aye Lwin added.

"Sanctions are an obstacle to investment and it is negative in nature. If the head of a family has been pushed aside, negative effects will impact his family members," he said.

Though Win Tin accepts the fact that sanctions can affect the ordinary people, it hurts the junta more, he felt. "Watering a burning house is not enough, sometimes we need to tear and break bamboo walls and roofs," he said.

London based Burma Campaign (UK), the organization fighting for democracy in Burma, also welcomed the EU's decision. They said if EU revokes the sanction, the junta will have the opportunity to abuse human rights more freely.

The EU statement welcomed and supported the report of Quintana, the United Nations human rights envoy to Burma. They urged cooperation with the UN envoy. In Quintana's report, he urged the UN to

consider establishing a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Burmese military junta.

[Suicide bomber targets Burmese police](#)

AFP/DVB - 28 April 2010

A man being interrogated by police in Burma detonated a bomb, killing himself and wounding four officers in eastern Karenni state, residents and officials said Wednesday.

The bomb Tuesday was the latest in a series of explosions to hit the military-ruled nation in recent weeks, as the reclusive junta government prepares to hold the country's first elections in 20 years.

"A man about 30 years old exploded the bomb and killed himself. Four police beside him were injured during the blast at the police station," a resident of Loikaw town in Karenni state told AFP, requesting anonymity.

"We do not know how he exploded the bomb," he said.

An official confirmed the blast and casualties in Loikaw, 400 kilometres (250 miles) from Burma's economic hub Rangoon.

"He had been taken to the police station for questioning as a suspect. Nobody suspected he would do this," the official said on condition of anonymity.

It was unclear exactly why he was taken for questioning and if he had intentionally committed suicide.

Also Tuesday, a series of grenade blasts hit a hydropower plant under construction in neighbouring Bago province, run by Burmese company Asia World Construction.

Another of the company's projects, a controversial dam in Kachin state, was hit by a series of bombs blasts earlier this month, injuring one engineer.

Three other bombs on 15 April hit a water festival in Rangoon, in the city's worst attack in five years. The official death toll from that attack has now risen to 10 people, with at least 170 wounded.

Authorities have arrested suspects in relation to the Rangoon blasts, officials said, but declined to give further details while investigations were ongoing.

Burma has been hit by several bomb blasts in recent years which the junta has blamed on armed exile groups or ethnic rebels.

The latest attacks come as the country prepares for polls, planned for the end of this year, which critics have dismissed as a sham due to the effective barring of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as she is a serving prisoner.

The military has ruled Burma since 1962, partly justifying its grip on power by the need to fend off ethnic rebellions that have plagued remote border areas for decades.

Armed minorities in Karen and Shan states continue to fight the government along the country's eastern border, alleging they are subject to neglect and mistreatment.

[Thein Sein to Head Political Party?](#)

Irrawaddy – 27 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Burma's Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein and about 20 other ministers are widely reported to be in the process of quitting their military posts to take on leading roles in a new pro-junta political party that will contest the general election this year, sources in Naypyidaw said.

Quoting Burmese officials in the capital, the sources said that Thein Sein and other generals, including: Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation Maj-Gen Htay Oo; Minister of Communications, Posts and

Telegraphs Brig-Gen Thein Zaw; and Deputy Minister of Home Affairs Brig-Gen Phone Swe, will head the new party.

Although the ministers will resign from the military, sources said, they will retain their current positions within the government.

Burma's state-run media has to date made no mention of Thein Sein's new role, but ran footage and reports of the general attending a religious ceremony along with junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe and other top brass in Naypyidaw on Monday.

However, officials in Naypyidaw do not deny the reports. "You should listen out for the news. Then you'll hear confirmation," an official from the Government Office in Naypyidaw told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday.

An editor with a private journal in Rangoon said, "As far I know, the news is confirmed. Officials in Naypyidaw told me the government will announce Thein Sein's candidacy in the coming days."

Speculation among Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members and businessmen in Rangoon is rife that Thein Sein will lead a pro-military party, which could be a proxy of the USDA, sources said, adding that respected civilians among local communities were being sought as candidates for the pro-government party.

An official from the pro-junta civic group, the USDA, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday that Thein Sein was being groomed by Than Shwe to run as the party leader.

"It sounds very possible," said Ohn Lwin, a politician in Rangoon whose party, the National Political Alliance, has applied to contest the election. "Gen Thein Sein could lead a party and become the next president."

Several official sources have recently tipped Thein Sein to play a leading role in a post-election government.

"Following the NLD [the main opposition National League for Democracy] decision not to register as a political party for the election, Snr-Gen Than Shwe has had a change of heart," said another official. "In his new plan, Gen Thein Sein will be president.

"Alongside Thein Sein, two chiefs at the Bureau of Special Operations, Lt-Gen Myint Swe and Lt-Gen Khin Zaw, will also be on Than Shwe's list," he said.

According to the sources, Htay Oo, who is also the current general secretary of the USDA, was previously in Than Shwe's favor as the man to lead the future government.

Htay Oo was reputed to be in favor of presenting a "free and fair" election in front of the international community, however. Sources have said that at a government meeting last year, he advocated "allowing" opposition parties 30 to 40 percent of parliamentary seats.

Businessmen close to the generals are now tipping Lt-Gen Hla Htay Win, the chief of armed forces training and former commander of the Rangoon regional military command, to step into the fold as an important figure in Burma's armed forces.

However, the future of the current No 3 and 4 ranking generals—Gen Shwe Mann, the joint chief of staff and coordinator of special operations (army, navy, air force), and Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo, the quartermaster-general and junta secretary-1—is now regarded as unsure. The two are reported to be rivals.

Several Burma observers said they were surprised to read state-run reports in the press that Tin Aung Myint Oo was absent from Than Shwe's religious ceremony in Naypyidaw on Monday. However, Shwe Mann was present.

[Karen ceasefire group apparently defies junta orders](#)

Mizzima - 28 April 2010

The Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) Peace Council, an armed ethnic ceasefire group, has apparently defied the Burmese junta's order to transform into a state militia, saying the junta has not fulfilled its ceasefire agreements.

In a letter to Burmese Chief of Military Intelligence Lieutenant General Ye Myint, Chairman of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, General Htay Maung, rejected the offer, stipulating that his group would not transform into a "Burma Army Militia Group".

General Htay Maung's letter, the authenticity of which could not be verified with KNU/KNLA Peace Council sources at the time of writing, is in response to Lieutenant General Ye Myint's proposal to the KNU/KNLA Peace Council extended on April 7th at Moulmein in southern Burma.

According to the letter, Lieutenant General Ye Myint held a meeting with representatives of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council on April 7th at which he proposed that the group transform itself, setting a deadline of April 22nd to respond to the proposal.

The KNU/KNLA Peace Council was formerly part of the Karen National Union's (KNU) 7th Brigade, fighting against successive central Burmese governments for over 60 years.

However, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council broke away from the KNU in February 2007, signing a separate peace deal with the junta.

Htay Maung, in the missive, said his group opposes any kind of military program and that his group would like to maintain peace and stability within Karen State, accusing the junta of breaking their peace agreement by continuing to increase military activities.

"Part of the conditions stated in our peace agreement with you is not to increase military activity or power on either side... but in three years since achieving peace, we have not seen evidence of any benefit on your part towards our Karen people except building houses and roads to enable us to live where we are," Htay Maung is credited with writing in the correspondence.

During the meeting in Moulmein the Burmese Army threatened the KNU/KNLA Peace Council that it would be declared an 'illegal' outfit if the group failed to positively respond by the deadline of April 22nd.

Ye Myint also reportedly cautioned the group not to expand its army and not to maintain contact with any other ethnic group.

Htay Maung, in his replay, said, "I would like to clarify to you that no matter what name you come up with, we will not agree or respond to any kind of military program which disturbs the peace and security of the lives of our Karen."

He said Karen people are feeling threatened and insecure with all the junta's ongoing military programs, forcing many to join the KNU/KNLA Peace Council Peace Force for their own defense.

"If it appears that we are increasing our forces it is due to your own military programs, not ours," allegedly argues Htay Maung.

With regard to the junta's demand not to meet and talk with the KNU, Htay Maung responded, "We Karen, all of us, are one family. Unity within the Karen is a top priority under the KNU umbrella. Unity among ourselves will only enhance the unity desired for the whole nation. The KNU/KNLA Peace Council holds no enemies."

The Burmese junta earlier pressured the KNU/KNLA Peace Council to transform into a Border Guard Force under the administration of the Burma Army. But the group also refused that offer.

The KNU, representing the ethnic Karen's struggle for political autonomy, is the oldest rebel group in Burma. But the group suffered a heavy blow in 1994 when a fraction – the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) – broke away and entered into a peace agreement with the Burmese junta.

The junta has in recent months pressured ethnic ceasefire groups to transform into a Border Guard Force to be administered by the Burma Army, encouraging the groups to join in its planned elections for later this year.

While a few groups, including the DKBA, have consented to the junta's proposal, major ceasefire groups including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and United Wa State Army (UWSA) have steadfastly rejected the proposal.

Htay Maung, in the letter, told Ye Myint that Burma today does not need any more military programs and that it is in critical need of peace and development, urging the junta to make the upcoming election inclusive.

"If by our refusal to bow to your military programs you then call us 'illegal', and by doing so declare war, you are no longer just faced with a one-party issue but with all the ethnic groups from every corner of Burma," cautioned Htay Aung.

"Mark my words. The whole world will know who has destroyed the peace and stability of the nation," he emphasized. "It is your call."

[Unofficial NMSP member censuses gathered across Mon State](#)

IMNA – 27 April 2010

IMNA's reporters have learned that following the New Mon State Party's (NMSP) refusal of the State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC) "people's militia" offer last week, members of the state-run Special Police have been calling upon village headmen across Mon State, collecting an unofficial list of NMSP members' names and villages of residence.

"They started it [gathering names] last week, it is happening in every township and also in the towns[villages as well as larger cities], they met with the village headmen and quarter headmen and they asked the number of NMSP members [in their village headmen and quarter headmen and they asked the number of NMSP members [in their villages and quarters]" reported a Moulmein resident connected with the city's Myaingtaryar quarter headman.

IMNA's field reporters across Mon State have gathered reports of similar NMSP census counts being collected by TPDC chairmen across the region, in the townships of Moulmein, Mudon, Thanphyuzayart, Ye, Pong, Kyaik-ma-yaw, and Chanung Zone.

"They [the TPDC and the Secret Police] asked like, 'How many NMSP members are in the village?, What did they do [for a living]?, where are they now?' Something like that. Some [NMSP] members they already know about, but some of they don't know about yet," said a village headman from Mudon Township, who asked that his village name be withheld.

According to a Pong town resident, "In our town, the Special Police came and took the NMSP's list on Monday".

Sources reported to IMNA that unofficial NMSP member counts have been taken in the past, usually during times of political tension between the NMSP and the SPDC.

"The authorities [the TPDC] hold the meeting every week, at the meeting they talk about the NMSP's activities. [In earlier times of conflict] they asked that how many NMSP members were in a village, they did this at every meeting" a retired government worker, whom asked that his personal details not be released, reported to IMNA.

Many sources indicated that the collection of NMSP members' personal information is a symptom of the breakdown of the NMSP's 1995 ceasefire with the SPDC; Southeast Command Lt. Gen. Ye Myint informed NMSP members on April 7th that a refusal of the SPDC's people's militia offer could result in the return of the "pre-ceasefire relationship between the two parties.

"The SPDC wants to know, if the NMSP members are still at home or not, that's why they do like that [retrieve member lists]. Now the situation between the NMSP and the SPDC is not the same as before, because the NMSP has rejected the [people's militia] offer," a political observer from Mudon Township explained to IMNA.

A spokesperson from the Human Rights Foundation of Monland explained that similar counts were frequently utilized in to aid in arrest and detainment of NMSP members before the 1995 ceasefire:

“In 1993 and 1994, they did this a lot...they collected not the names of the NMSP members, but the names of their families in the jungle. If they believed that the NMSP member had committed a bomb blast for example, they could call upon the family to bring this member forward...it’s a way of finding whom to blame.”

Ceasefire Shan Army’s HQ transformed as Home Guard Force

SHAN - 27 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

The Shan State Army (SSA) ‘North’ s Hsengkeow headquarters force in Shan State North’s Hsipaw township, that had accepted Naypyitaw’s home guard force program, has been officially named as Hsengkeow Home Guard Force (HGF) on Sunday 25 April, to be run by the Burma Army.

The ceremony was presided over by Deputy Commander of Northeastern Region Command based in Lashio, according to a source from the headquarters. “Militia member cards and badges were also issued on the same day.”

Due to Naypyitaw’s constant pressure, the faction agreed to comply with the junta’s demand that requires 900-1,000 of their men to form 3 homeguard battalions on 22 April when its chairman Maj-Gen Loimao with other 12 top leaders met Maj-Gen Aung Than Tut, Commander of the Burma Army’s Northeastern Region Command at Lashio headquarters.

The faction is 200 strong including 100 members from its 3rd Brigade commanded by Colonel Hla Myint. Many, who disagreed with the program, were said to be leaving to join the 1st Brigade.

The SSA-N has 3 brigades (1, 3, 7), one border force and one HQ Security Force. The 1st Brigade is based in Wanhai, Kehsi township, Shan State South, under the command of Maj-Gen Parngfa; Brigade No.3 in Mongkhuhr, Mongyai township, Shan State North, under the command of Maj-Gen Loimao; Brigade No.7 in Kali, Hsipaw township, Shan State North, led by Maj-Gen Gaifa. Its paramount leader Maj Gen Hso Ten is serving a 106 year jail sentence in Khamti.

Among them, the 1st Brigade is the strongest with approximately 2,500 fully armed strength, and is the group that did not agreed with its headquarter to transform into junta run force.

The second strongest brigade is the Brigade No.7. The Deputy Commander of the Eastern Command reportedly visited the group’s 7th Brigade during this week in order to lobby them to follow their headquarters, a reliable source from Kali told SHAN.

“But its leader Maj-Gen Gaifa is reported to have been on a trip,” he said.

A senior officer from the headquarters clarified that the group will never break up into two parts even though its headquarters has been changed. “We will remain the same as before.”

According to the military junta announcement, 22 April was set up as the latest deadline for all ceasefire groups to give their consent on the border guard force (BGF) proposal. Nevertheless, there are still 3 other groups that have yet to give response to the program even though the deadline passed. The groups are the United Wa State Army, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) known as Mongla group.

During the middle of the month, the groups including the SSA-North were said to have met at an undisclosed place, near Panghsang the Wa capital. They reached an agreement to form Command, Control, and Communications Center for their joint defense, according to an informed source from the Sino-Burma border.

The First Brigade will stick to the 4 party agreements, it says.

Energy Companies in Burma Urged to Disclose Payments

Irrawaddy – 27 April 2010

By Simon Roughneen

BANGKOK — Landmark legislation currently before the US Congress could force oil, gas and mining companies to disclose information about payments to governments of countries in which they invest around the world, including Burma.

If passed, the US Energy Security through Transparency Act will require all oil, gas and mining companies registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission to disclose data on payments made to foreign governments.

The NGO Earthrights International (ERI) said that “this will impact nearly every major oil and gas company around the world,” given that foreign companies must register with the SEC to do business in the US.

ERI's Matthew Smith told a press conference in Bangkok today that this would also put pressure on Chinese and other Asian companies investing in Burma's natural resources to comply.

Heightening pressure on Total, Chevron and Thailand's PTTEP —three companies involved in the Yadana gas project and pipeline in Burma—an initiative launched on Tuesday in Bangkok called on the companies to reveal payments made to the Burmese military regime over the 18 years since Total signed a production sharing contract with Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). The pending US legislation will not apply retrospectively, meaning that companies will only have to disclose payments going forward.

Backed by 160 NGOs, unions and policy figures such as former Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik and ex-president of Ireland Mary Robinson, the statement urged companies to publish “comprehensive data and information,” and “publish all payments made to the Burmese authorities since 1992.”

Separately, Chevron shareholders will vote next month on a proposal that would require the company to disclose payments to foreign governments, including Burma. Smith believes that revenue transparency is in the best interests of companies, helping avoid the appearance of complicity in mismanagement of Burma's gas revenue and potentially boosting shareholder value. Chevron has already disclosed payments made to the Thai Government, with a given total of US \$5 billion.

Since the Yadana gas first came on-stream in 2000, EI estimates that it has generated \$7.5 billion in sales to Thailand, where it powers electricity stations and keeps Bangkok lit-up and air-conditioned. Much of this revenue has been siphoned off by the Burmese junta into banks in Singapore, according to EI, whose report in September 2009 prompted two Singapore-based banks—Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) and DBS Group—to deny allegations that they function as “offshore repositories” for junta revenues accruing from the Yadana gas project.

Asked by *The Irrawaddy* if the disclosure of revenues would have any real impact on the junta's economic policies, or on the immediate prospects for reform in Burma, Matthew Smith said, “We don't think this will mean an immediate end to villagers being press-ganged into working as porters or land being confiscated for natural resource projects, but it is good practice for companies involved in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and will highlight the need for better governance in Burma.”

“Disclosure on revenue spending is crucial for development in the country and for clearer and better management of the country's vast natural wealth,” he said.

Analysts said that transparency might focus attention on the junta's penchant for cooking the books, if the real and full figures are revealed. By using an outdated exchange rate, the military regime in Burma declares a small fraction of its oil and gas revenues to the State budget, enabling it to siphon off the balance. The junta calculates revenue at just 6 kyat to the dollar when the de facto rate is closer to 1,000. According to a confidential 2009 report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), this revenue “contributed less than 1 percent of total budget revenue in 2007/08, but would have contributed about 57 percent if valued at the market exchange rate.”

According to Naing Htoo, an ethnic Karen working as project coordinator for ERI, “the Burmese people need to know the truth about their country's resources.” The revenues from oil and gas sales could fund badly needed social spending. However, this money enables the junta to maintain what is believed to be southeast Asia's largest army. The country has low levels of health and education spending, amid

widespread poverty. A 2006 estimate of the child mortality rate in eastern Myanmar was 221 per 1,000, higher than the 205 recorded in the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of the Congo. The World Health Organization ranks the nation's health system as the second worst on the planet, while according to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, more than 25 percent of the population lacks access to potable water.

Oil and gas investment enables the junta to counter the impact of Western sanctions, which though coming under question in recent months, are ostensibly in place to try to force the junta into political reform. The EU renewed its sanctions on the regime after discussing the bloc's "Common Position" on Burma on Monday.

Yadana disclosure might have an impact on other current and future resource extraction projects in Burma. Speaking in Bangkok on Tuesday, Wong Aung of the Shwe Gas Movement outlined how human rights abuses often ensue due to resource extraction projects in Burma, while revenues from oil and gas enable the junta to remain immune from pressure to reform.

Wong Aung's organization is seeking a postponement of the Shwe gas project, which will likely generate greater revenues for the Burmese junta than the Yadana counterpart. According the Shwe Gas Movement website, "Burma's military regime would stand to gain \$ 24 billion over the 20-year contract, or \$ 1.2 billion per year."

[Wa Region needs export crops, Wa party says](#)

Mizzima - 27 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai – Exportable crops need to be planted in Wa regions that have yet to substitute opium cultivation with other crops, an ethnic Wa political party that is to register with the Election Commission, said.

Wa National Unity Party patron Saw Philip Sam said the soil in the region was suitable for growing opium but substitute crops had failed to thrive.

"We need to raise the living standards of farmers. So, we need to review the foreign markets and ... grow [cash] crops suited to the region. After that, we will be able to export the crops to foreign countries", he told Mizzima.

One of the parties from that has remained active since the 1990 election, the party formerly known as the Wa National Development Party has five former party members and 10 new members. It will register with the Election Commission at Naypyidaw this week.

The party was seeking advice from foreign agriculturalists about growing crops for export, Saw Philip Sam said.

Most of the party leaders are farmers and traders, not politicians.

"We will register the party to discuss and give advice on ethnic issues and to promote ethnic rights", party secretary Nyi Pa Loap who will go to Naypyidaw to register the party, said.

However, he conceded that the 2008 constitution failed to guarantee ethnic rights, although he participated in the 14-year process of drafting the law.

Wa National Unity Party will be based at Lashio, Shan State, and it will contest in three of six townships in Wa State where Wa people live. The targeted townships are Ho Pang, Tang Yang and Kyaing Tong.

"Our policies will be social democratic. We will choose policies that are not extreme. We'll take and apply the good points from the political left and right," Saw Philip Sam said. "We will judge whether a policy is good or not, based on the nature of our people, our region and our culture."

Although Wa State was developed economically, it was underdeveloped in terms of civil rights, education and health care, he continued.

Moreover, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) would continue to reject the junta's proposal for its troops to join the Burmese army's Board Guard Force (BGF) as long as the group was denied ethnic rights, he added. He said the election process would be all-embracing, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Wa National Development Party was registered in 1989 and contested the two constituencies, Ho Pang and Tang Yang, in the 1990 election, but failed to win any seats.

Some leaders of the former party died and were replaced. The party applied to the Election Commission on April 22 to continue operating but it was rejected and told to apply as a new party, the chairman of the new party, Loap Paung said.

Some of the existing parties from the 1990 polls, the National Unity Party, Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organisation, the Lahu National Development Party, and the Union Karen League, have applied to continue as political parties.

Twenty-one parties have applied for registration. Among them are parties from 13 ethnic groups, including Kachin, Kayang, Karen, Pa-O, Chin, Mro or Khami, Shan and Taaung (Palaung).

[IDP influx instigates Halochanee camp supply crisis](#)

IMNA – 27 April 2010

By Jaloon Htaw:

According to administrators at Halochanee resettlement camp on the Thailand-Burma border, a recent influx of Mon internally displaced persons (IDPs), fleeing from the threat of conflict in southern Mon State's Tavoy District, has stretched camp resources to the limit.

Tavoy residents have been fleeing from their homes to the Thailand-Burma border since last week, after the New Mon State Party (NMSP) publicly refused to convert its armed wing into a Burmese government-run force. The relocation of Burmese military battalions to the border of NMSP-controlled territory in Tavoy district instigated widespread fears of an impending invasion, and prompted a mass migration to the already-crowded Halochanee camp.

Food, water, and other supplies for members of Halochanee camp are overseen by a variety of non-governmental organizations, including the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC), and the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC); however, sources inside the camp claim that such supplies are insufficient for the needs of the numerous IDPs who arrived last week.

"The food supplies will only be enough for the next 2 days. We not sure beyond then. But The TBBC [Thailand-Burma Border Consortium] came yesterday. They said when they arrived at their office in Thailand they would arrange for food supplies. But we have not heard from them yet," reported a member of the Mon Relief and Development Committee (MRDC) from Halochanee.

According to this MRDC member, the organization has been taking a count of the Mon IDPs who have arrived in the camp from Tavoy since last week; as of today, 250 new arrivals have taken shelter in Halochanee, while another 279 are being sheltered at nearby Balikedonbike camp.

He also explain that the new arrivals in both camps are mostly women and children; they have fled from villages throughout the Tavoy region, including the villages of Tapyuchoung, Palan, Hanee, Chairtike, and A nie. Both camps are reported to be currently housing the new IDP population in schools and Buddhist temples.

A long-time Halochanee resident told IMNA that many of the new arrivals have shared plans to return to their homes inside Mon State as soon as the current threat of violence lessens. Besides the impending food shortage, the new IDPs in Halochanee have reported that the camp lacks sufficient sanitation facilities and shelter to house them properly; Halochanee camp is also reportedly suffering from a water shortage.

A woman from Tapyuchauung village, who arrived at Halochanee camp with her children last week, informed IMNA, "We don't have plans to stay in Thailand because we have a plantation in our village.

Now my husband is still at my home, we came to the camp first, because if the Burmese army comes he can run away easily. He will wait and [monitor] the situation.”

27/04/2010

Statements

[Council conclusions on Burma/Myanmar - 3009th Foreign Affairs Council meeting](#) - 26 April 2010

News

[EU renews sanctions against Burmese regime](#)

Mizzima - 27 April 2010

By Mungpi

Oklahoma City – European Union foreign ministers on Monday agreed to extend its existing economic sanctions against military-ruled Burma for another year, and called on the military regime to stop “violation of international human rights and humanitarian law”.

“The Council deems it necessary to extend the restrictive measures provided for in the current EU decision by another year,” a statement by the Foreign Ministers of the 27 European nations said.

But the council emphasised its readiness to revise, amend or reinforce the restrictive measures in the light of developments on the ground.

“The EU stands ready to respond positively to genuine progress in Burma/Myanmar,” the group said.

EU also urged the Burmese regime to co-operate with the United Nations and its special envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana and comply with the UN recommendations “by taking urgent measures to put an end to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law”.

The Council also called on the Burmese military regime to embark on a genuine political dialogue between all stakeholders, including the ethnic groups and the opposition to bring about a peaceful transition to a democratic, civilian and inclusive system of government. It, however, expressed serious concerns over election laws published by the junta in early March saying they “do not provide for free and fair elections and notes that the authorities of Burma/Myanmar still have to take the steps necessary to make the planned elections later this year a credible, transparent and inclusive process”.

The European Union first introduced sanctions on Burma in 1996. The sanctions have been updated, renewed and extended every year in April.

They include visa bans, an arms embargo, limiting diplomatic contacts, freezing officials’ offshore accounts and suspending non-humanitarian aid or development programmes.

EU’s extension of sanctions on the Burmese regime for another year was applauded by campaigners, with the Burma Campaign UK director Mark Farmaner saying, “The EU is right to maintain existing sanctions in light of the deteriorating human rights situation in Burma.”

“We welcome the EU’s call for the regime to respect international human rights law, but are disappointed that they have not explicitly expressed support for the recommendation of the UN Burma expert that a UN commission of inquiry should be established,” Mr. Farmaner said in a statement released on Monday.

The Burma rights group said relaxing sanctions would be a green light to the generals to increase human rights abuses, help finance increased abuses, and give up potential leverage against the regime.

It also urged the 27 member-countries of the EU to abide by its common policy on Burma and to use the sanctions to effectively target the junta as part of co-ordinated diplomatic efforts.

[After Renewing Sanctions, EU Seeks Meeting with Junta](#)

Irrawaddy – 27 April 2010

By Simon Roughneen

BANGKOK — European Union (EU) foreign ministers have renewed the bloc's "Common Position" on Burma, extending existing sanctions until April 2011.

In a statement released on Monday, the European Council expressed "serious concerns" that the recently published election laws "do not provide for free and fair elections." and restated its call "for the release of the political prisoners and detainees, including Aung San Sui Kyi."

However, the EU said that it "stands ready to respond positively to genuine progress in Burma/Myanmar." In keeping with the Western trend toward dialogue with the Burmese military junta, the EU says it hopes to maintain its dialogue with Naypidaw.

The EU had previously pledged to tighten or expand sanctions if the junta did not respond to requests for reform. However, despite what the European Burma Network listed as a number of factors in what it deemed to be "a continued decline in the human rights and political situation in Burma," since the common position was last discussed in April 2009, the bloc has not amended its existing sanctions.

This comes after months of the US discussing a pledge to relax its sanctions on the junta, if Napyidaw responded positively to its overtures. Asean member-states, which do significant business in Burma, spun the US "policy review" as an admission by Washington that sanctions had not worked.

Existing EU sanctions do not target business cronies of the junta, in the way US sanctions do. Campaign groups believe that European sanctions are applied reactively, whenever there is a sufficiently glaring atrocity in Burma, rather than as part of a clear strategy.

Moreover, the existing sanctions are not adhered to, or at least can be gotten around. A year-old report by Friends of the Earth (Netherlands) demonstrated that loopholes exist, with Burmese gems for import into the EU sold openly on the Ebay website. Burma is renowned for the quality of its rubies in particular.

The EU will try to take its discussions with the junta to the next level, by sending a diplomatic mission to Burma later this year. But it was unclear if Naypyidaw would be willing to receive EU diplomats.

"We are only prepared to go there if we are received at the highest level. We are not prepared to be humiliated," an unnamed diplomat told *Agence-France Press* on Monday.

Within the EU, there has been much debate over ultimate responsibility for foreign policy, especially in the context of the recently agreed to Lisbon Treaty. While the political and legal ramifications of the vast and complex treaty await some untangling, a new EU "foreign minister" is in place, and additional powers have been shifted away from national governments to Brussels and European Commission officials. Some national politicians openly advocate for a more centralized "European" foreign policy.

European-based Burma lobby groups sent a letter to the foreign ministers prior to the Monday meeting, a copy of which was seen by *The Irrawaddy*. The groups said that they "are deeply concerned that European Commission staff openly and publicly advocate against the agreed Common Position of EU members states and against the positions taken by the European Parliament in its resolutions. We believe that it is unacceptable that Commission officials who have no democratic mandate undermine the official position of democratically accountable member states and the European Parliament."

EU member states are in theory meant to adhere to the common position. However, the reality is somewhat more complex. The statement on Monday outlined that the EU "welcomes the adoption of Resolution 13/25 of the UN Human Rights Council, and endorses the Progress report by the UN Special Rapporteur, Mr Quintana."

However the EU did not explicitly endorse Quintana's recommendation that the UN Security Council look into setting up a Commission of Inquiry into possible war crimes in Burma. The UK and the Czech Republic, both EU member states, had previously backed Quintana's recommendation. Ireland did not back the recommendation directly, instead opting to await the revision of the EU common position.

On the other hand, campaign groups believe that other EU member states would prefer to soften the common position. France refused to back calls for Total to end its operations in Burma, and both Paris and Berlin have in the past sought to block EU sanctions on Burma.

However, there are what some observers believe to be important changes in the EU stance, such as its emphasis on calling for the junta to talk to the opposition and ethnic groups. The NLD has refused to take part in what it deems sham elections, and many ethnic militias are refusing to agree to the junta's push for them to join the state security forces.

In a press release, Burma UK Campaign Director Mark Farmaner said, "We strongly welcome the call for the regime to enter into dialogue with the opposition and ethnic groups," and added, "We call on the EU to make this the main focus of diplomatic efforts, rather than trying to tinker with laws relating to fake elections later this year."

[Suu Kyi's Lawyer Clarifies Her Comment on Thai Politics](#)

Irrawaddy – 26 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer tried to clarify a controversial remark over the weekend by Burmese pro-democracy leader on the Thai political situation, saying it was a general conversation, not a policy comment.

"She made the remark during a short, general conversation," said Nyan Win, her long-time lawyer. "If I recall her conversation, she said the 2008 Constitution [in Burma] was written by the military. There is also a Constitution, written by the military, in Thailand. Now it causes unrest [in Thailand]. So if the military writes constitutions, it could be a concern for a nation's stability."

Nyan Win also said Suu Kyi did not mention Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra during the conversation, as reported by *Agence France-Presse* on Saturday. A quotation by the news agency alleged that Suu Kyi said: "Thaksin was an elected person. The military seized power from an elected person. The Constitution was drawn up by the military."

"I did not say that she mentioned the name [Thaksin]," said Nyan Win. "What I said is that she said a military coup ousted an elected government and wrote a Constitution. Now the ruling under the Constitution affects unrest [in Thailand]," Nyan Win told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday.

He said that Suu Kyi's comments were casual remarks, not a policy statement on the Thai political scene.

No media has had access to Suu Kyi while she has been under detention, and media reports on her thoughts and observations are gleaned from comments made her lawyer Nyan Win, who is allowed to meet with her regularly.

Nyan Win's recent summary of their conversations stirred up a wide range of reactions among the Thai media, Thai politicians and intellectuals.

"I feel very disappointed. Aung San Suu Kyi should understand Thailand better than this," said Thai Sen. Prasong Nuluck, quoted in the Thai-language *Matichon* newspaper in Bangkok. He called for an investigation into Suu Kyi's financial assets to determine if she received "any money from any person," presumably a reference to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

The senator said Suu Kyi's comments would cause damage to Thailand's image in the international community.

Matichon quoted Thai government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn as saying that Suu Kyi could not be uninformed about Thailand's political situation: "Some countries might not get enough information because of the language or because the methods of communication are systematically blocked. Thus, the news may not be complete."

During her detention, Suu Kyi keeps up with Burmese politics and international affairs through a shortwave radio receiver, listening to foreign-based broadcasts in the Burmese language as well as *BBC World Service*.

Thai intellectuals who sympathize with Burma's pro-democracy movement also questioned Suu Kyi's comments, with some reacting to her comments on Facebook and blogs.

One Thai expert on Burma questioned on her Facebook page whether it was really Suu Kyi's comments.

"Politics and the military in Thailand are very different from those in Burma. It is surprising to learn that Suu Kyi compared the Burmese junta's Constitution to Thailand's," she wrote. "Both were written under the military, however, under far different political contexts. We shouldn't have a stereotypical image of the so-called 'military,'" she said.

Although Thailand's Democrat Party has supported the democracy movement in Burma during the past two decades, Suu Kyi's comment could harm relations between the Burmese opposition and the Democrat Party in Thailand, some analysts said.

Last year, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has supported Thaksin after his ouster, said there were similarities to Thaksin's plight and Suu Kyi's, which angered many Burmese at home and abroad.

"Many people talk about Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, so why not talk about Thaksin? That cannot be referred to as interfering [in Thailand's affairs]," Hun Sen said at the Asean summit in the Thai resort of Hua Hin in October 2009.

[New Delhi becomes unsafe for Burmese refugees](#)

Narinjara News – 26 April 2010

Nava Thakuria: The Indian capital city has increasingly become an unsafe place for the Burmese refugees. In the recent past, three incidences of attack on Burmese were reported. As the victims are identified as Chin, a major community of Burma, the Chin Refugee Committee has taken the pain to lodge FIR in the local police station.

The last attack by miscreants on Chin people took place on April 23, when Fung Ling was targeted on his way to residence at around 6.30 in the evening at Uttam Nagar of Delhi. Mr Ling, 37, is a recognized refugee (UNHCR No.08IND01388) in India and he was challenged by two youths on motorbike.

Mr Ling replied that he could not follow Hindi language. Meanwhile, a fellow Chin (Burmese) refugee, Than Sang approached and tried to intervene that Ling did not understand Hindi. But Than Sang (UNHCR No.08IND01410) received a slap from one of the two bikers.

The situation turned worse, as the youths started beating both the refugees. Ling was hit by a brick on his head and he got fainted. Then arrived another refugee Van Lal Lian (UNHCR No.08C00279) and more other people at the location and it was finally over.

“We have lodged an FIR (MLC. 7715) at Bindapur police station, Uttam Nagar regarding the assault to Fung Ling and other,” informed Ro Mawi, president of Chin Refugee Committee, India. Speaking to this writer from New Delhi, he however expressed dissatisfaction that the doctors examining the victims had reported only simple injuries to them.

Mentionable that Fung Ling and his family (wife and five minor children) arrived in New Delhi in 1998. They are now working as daily wage earner to earn at the most Rs. 2,000 per month.

Similarly, Than Sang and Van Lal Lian with their families also arrived in New Delhi in the same year.

Earlier another assault case was reported from Sitapuri in the same locality where another Chin refugee, Zo Ram Thang (BU-491) was targeted by the unidentified miscreants on April 21. Zo Ram Thang and his family arrived in New Delhi in 1999 and they are surviving with a very few amount of money earned as private factory workers.

News - Elections

[EC Approves Three More Party Registrations](#)

Irrawaddy – 26 April 2010

By Ko Htwe

Burma's Election Commission (EC) on Friday approved three applications to register as political parties: the Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar); the Pa-O National Organization (PNO); and the Taaung (Palaung) National Party.

A total of five parties' registrations have now been approved for this year's scheduled general election. On Thursday, the EC announced that it had accepted the applications of two political parties: the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP); and the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar.

The five approved parties are all affiliated with or known to be sympathetic to the military junta, leading observers to suggest that pro-junta parties are receiving preferential treatment by the EC.

"It is obvious that these parties support the regime. As for the ethnic parties that were approved, it is clear that were allowed to register because they are small and insignificant," said Aye Thar Aung from the Arakan League for Democracy, which has announced it will not compete in the election.

Rangoon-based veteran politician Chan Htun said, "I think more parties will form in accordance with the regulations set up by the regime, which probably believes that the more political parties appear on the ballot, the more support its election will gain."

The Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar) was founded by former members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) who resigned from the pro-democracy party in Mandalay Division. Its party headquarters will be based in Patheingyi Township in Mandalay.

Ye Min, the current head of the Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar), said the party mainly plans to contest seats in Mandalay Division. As yet, the party has not announced its leadership nor revealed its party flag. Ye Min said that five executive members had been overseeing the party in rotation.

"We will soon select our party leadership and form an executive committee," said Ye Min. "Then we will submit the list to the EC and begin organizing activities once we have been approved."

Aye Lwin, the head of the UMFNP, is believed to have established a close relationship with the military authorities. He reportedly met recently with Burma's chief of police and Rangoon mayor Brig-Gen Aung Thein Lin. His brother, Ye Htun, also chairs an approved party—the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar.

Although Ye Htun's party is named after the 88 generation students group, it appears to have few connections with the prominent 88 Generation Students group leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, who are currently in prison serving 65-year sentences for their roles as political dissidents.

The PNO is led by Aung Kham Hti. It signed a cease-fire agreement with the regime in April 1991 and joined the National Convention in 1993.

The PNO was allocated control over a region in southern Shan State following its cease-fire pact. The junta also fast-tracked business permits for leaders of the PNO, allowing them to establish a major gem and jewelry company named Jade Dragon.

The PNO has been excavating gemstones and gold in Shan and Kachin states and in Sagaing Division in recent years. In late 2000, it donated a jade dyke weighing 3,000 tons to the regime.

Meanwhile, state-run newspapers have announced that another ethnic party, the Lahu National Development Party (LNDP), which competed in the 1990 election, has submitted an application to the EC for party registration along with three new ethnic-based parties. Out of 10 preexisting political parties, the LNDP is the fourth that has re-registered at the EC.

To date, 23 parties have applied for party registration.

[Burmese PM quits military post](#)

DVB - 27 April 2010

By Francis Wade

More than 20 senior Burmese government ministers, including the prime minister, General Thein Sein, yesterday retired from their military posts in a move that analysts claim will allow them to focus on elections this year.

A government source told AFP however that the move was just a “uniform change”, with the ministers likely to retain their position and responsibilities.

Burma analyst Larry Jagan told *DVB* however that the ministers will go further than quitting just their military posts.

“I’m hearing that they will be resigning their ministerial post in the very near future and an interim cabinet will be set up and they will then declare their candidacy for the elections,” he said.

“There is some doubt over whether Thein Sein was actually going to be entering politics – he wanted to retire from politics. It’s really difficult to say what he’s going to be doing, I don’t think he knows.

“A lot is going to depend on what [junta chief] Than Shwe decides he’s doing, but this is the first real sign that [Thein Sein] is likely to have a political role.”

The government is yet to set a date for elections, although it has confirmed they will be held in the second half of the year. Nineteen political parties [have already registered](#) to contest the polls, while Burma’s main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), announced it would not be running in light of the draconian election laws.

Critics of the ruling junta have said that the elections are a sham designed to appease international pressure on the regime, which will continue its grip on power after the elections under the guise of a civilian government. The 2008 constitution already guarantees the army around a quarter of parliamentary seats prior to voting.

The role that the military’s top brass will play in a new government remains unclear. Than Shwe, who has ruled Burma since 1992, is pushing 80, and analysts believe he may step out of the limelight and take more of a backseat role, despite remaining an influential figure in government.

Key figures in a number of registered parties are known to hold close ties to the junta, although it remains to be seen what sort of leverage they will have in the new parliament.

The election laws and constitution appear to have been designed to limit any chances of parliamentary seats for political opposition, while various government proxy organisations, such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), are rumoured to be forming parties that will consolidate the current government’s support base.

[NLD turns to grass-roots social work on May 7](#)

Mizzima - 26 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, is to halt its political activities and “plunge headlong into possible social work” from May 7, an NLD spokesman said.

Ohn Kyaing, a spokesman and party central executive committee member, made the comments today after attending a meeting of the committee at party headquarters in Bahan Township, Rangoon. “We will stop political work from May 7 and we will plunge headlong into possible social work,” he told Mizzima.

The group will provide social services including programmes for: HIV patients; access to pure drinking water for victims of Cyclone Nargis; families of political prisoners; legal aid to clients sued in political cases, and preserving the natural environment, Ohn Kyaing said.

Fellow committee member Win Tin elaborated on the NLD’s new path.

“Our party is a political party, so, when need to carry out tasks; those can help to improve the people’s living conditions,” he said.

"We will help the victims of injustice, we will lead when the people need [us to lead], we will [continue to] fight for the people's rights. These are social tasks. When we don't have offices, we need to go to the people and pay for services for them," he said. "We will find politics among the people. Some tasks may match current tasks or we may find more powerful tasks. Or our tasks may involve 'soft politics'. Either way, we will move among and provide for the grass roots."

Sixteen of the 20-member committee attended, apart from the general secretary, Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest; party chairman Aung Shwe, who is unwell; party secretary U Lwin and Lun Tin.

Members also decided against removing party signboards and flags from NLD offices. "We may be able to open the offices, but if the authorities order them closed and locked, there's nothing we can do. They have the power ...," Win Tin said. "All the same, we won't voluntarily close the offices but we will keep the flag flying."

Ms Suu Kyi urged her party to keep the signboards and flags up when she met her lawyers on Saturday, despite the party's automatic dissolution on May 6. The junta released electoral laws on March 8 that appeared designed to directly hamper Suu Kyi and her party as they forbid anyone who has been imprisoned from taking part in polls along with anyone who has been married to a foreigner, both categories with which the NLD leader cannot comply. Also, parties must re-register before May 6 or cease to be. The NLD chose against re-registering, saying an election under such laws would be unfair and unjust.

Though there were about 300 NLD offices throughout the country, the military junta closed them all after the Depayin massacre in May 2003. But, after it declared the electoral laws on March 8, it allowed NLD to open more than 100 offices.

Details of decisions reached at the party meeting will be declared soon, a source said.

[NLD Will Leave Its Flag Raised](#)

Irrawaddy – 26 April 2010

RANGOON — The National League for Democracy (NLD) will not remove its signboard and flag from party headquarters even though it is set to be dissolved when the deadline for party registration expires on May 6, said the NLD central executive committee statement on Monday.

"We decided unanimously not to take down the party signboard and flag," said NLD spokesperson Nyan Win.

Ohn Kyaing, an NLD information committee member, said that in accordance with Aung San Suu Kyi's guidance, in the future the party would focus on non-political as well as political activities.

"For the benefit of our people, we will continue to work on social activities as much as we can," Ohn Kyaing told *The Irrawaddy*.

He repeated that the NLD would not re-register to contest the election because it could not accept the 2008 Constitution, and so eventually the party would have to stop its political activities.

He added, however, that the party's decision to keep its signboard and flag was intended to show that the NLD still paid serious attention to the people, still existed for the people and still considered its duties not yet completed.

"We want the people to know that we still have the will to work for them—we haven't achieved what we wanted, and we still have work to do," said Ohn Kyaing.

Dr. May Win Myint of the NLD's women's wing said that until May 4 the party will continue to meet in front of the NLD's headquarters to offer food to monks and prayers for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners. She said that future plans will be announced after a meeting on May 4.

Details of the NLD's social activities also will be available after May 4, sources close to the party said.

Meanwhile the European Unions Foreign Affairs Council, meeting in Luxembourg discussing a number of international issues like Afghanistan, Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, and Burma, expresses its serious concerns on the Burmese election laws as published in early March, saying precondition of the elections “do not provide for free and fair elections and notes that the authorities of Burma/Myanmar still have to take the steps necessary to make the planned elections later this year a credible, transparent and inclusive process.”

According to the statement released on Monday, the council reiterates its call for the release of the political prisoners, including Suu Kyi.

News - BGF

[NMSP reaches final decision on joining BGF](#)

Kaowao Newsgroup – 24 April 2010

The New Mon State Party has rejected a plan to transform its army into a Border Guard Force, Kaowao has learned. The NMSP’s armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), was ordered to form a Regional Militia Force (or) Hta-Nay Pyithu-Sit at a meeting held earlier this month between the NMSP and SPDC in the capital of Mon State, Moulmein.

The ethnic armed cease-fire groups including the NMSP were given an April 22nd deadline on whether to form a BGF according to the junta’s demands. The Burmese junta wants the ethnic armed groups to be administered by the Burmese Army Tatmadaw forces along the border areas.

The NMSP responded to Major General Ye Myint, the military junta’s chief negotiator from Military Affairs Security, who had warned the Mon last week that failing to agree to the plan will be an act of war against the Burmese government.

The NMSP’s Vice President Nai Rotsa said the final decision was made during the Central Committee meeting this week with a reply being sent to the SPDC.

After reaching their final decision not to transform their army, Nai Hongsar, the secretary of the NMSP, commented that, “Our revolution will never weaken. There is no democracy and ethnic rights in Burma . . . these are the root causes of the conflict in Burma”.

The first meeting between the NMSP, comprised of Vice President Nai Rotsa, Nai Chan Toi, Nai Tala Nyeh, Nai Htawara and Colonel Layeh Gakow, and the junta’s Chief Military Affairs Security Maj-Gen Ye Myint took place at the Southeast Command in Moulmein on April 7th, 2010.

The President of the NMSP General Htaw Mon said to a Kaowao reporter, “It is a critical time not only for the NMSP but for the Mon population as a whole.”

“It is very impressive to see the judgment day for the NMSP and how our leaders responded to it. Pressure is mounting and it is unacceptable for the NMSP and MNLA to become a border guard force or militia. The NMSP leaders know how to serve the general population and deal with problems in a peaceful manner,” said a veteran of the NMSP who lives in Thailand.

The Burmese Army is stepping up plans to enforce state security by controlling all the ethnic armed ceasefire groups in the border areas who are being pressured to provide security along Burma’s border regions ahead of the general elections which are to be held later this year. Many observers believe the SPDC is pressuring the ethnic cease-fire groups to become a BGF in order to restrict and control their movements.

During the cease-fire deal in 1995, the NMSP was designated 14 areas but the SPDC has occasionally intruded into their zones in recent months.

At the Central Committee meeting of the NMSP last month, the Mons decided not to join the Border Guard Force or the upcoming general election.

The recent meeting after the Songkran New Year was a critical moment for the NMSP and, many Mons are waiting on the edge of their seats to know what the junta’s next move will be on whether it will carry out its threat or back down on launching a war against the ethnic groups.

NDF vows to continue armed struggle

Mizzima - 26 April 2010

Chiang Mai - In a major development that may lead to fresh armed conflict between the armed ceasefire groups and the Burmese Army, the National Democratic Front - Burma (NDF) has declared that it will join hands with its allies to attack the junta on multiple front lines.

"The flames of civil war will be fuelled. We are discussing amongst ourselves to open many front lines around the country if the junta opens even one," Mai Phone Kyaw, General Secretary of NDF, warned.

The NDF's Central Committee meeting was held on April 23 and 24 and 18 representatives from seven groups of eight attended and resolved to continue armed struggle.

A NDF statement said it supports the rejection by ceasefire groups of the junta's proposal to transform their armed wings to the Border Guard Force (BGF).

Mai Phone Kyaw said NDF has established a rapport and a mutual understanding with other ceasefire groups and has already conveyed its intention to them.

He added that the NDF has suggested to the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which was accused of producing opium, to fight for its national rights. He also pointed out that there is enough evidence of top junta leaders' involvement in opium production operations.

The statement said NDF opposes the 2008 constitution and the junta's one-sided election, which will only legitimize the military dictatorship and increase its stranglehold on the country. It welcomed the NLD's decision not to re-register the party with the country's Election Commission.

The NDF was formed with 13 ethnic armed groups on May 10, 1976, to fight for ethnic rights and self-determination.

Later, some of the groups arrived at a ceasefire agreement with the junta, leaving eight groups, the Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF), New Mon State Party (NMSP), PaO National Liberation Organization (PNLO), Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), Wa National Organization (WNO), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) in the National Democratic Front fold.

Ceasefire Shan army to split into two factions

SHAN - 26 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

The ceasefire Shan State Army (SSA) 'North' is likely to separate into two factions due to some of its brigades' response to comply with Naypyidaw's demand that requires 900-1,000 of their men to form 3 homeguard battalions without agreement by all the fighters, according to reliable sources from the Sino-Burma border.

The response was given on 22 April, the latest deadline for all ethnic groups to give their consent on the border guard force (BGF) proposal. The group's top leader Maj-Gen Loimao with other 12 top members accepted the proposal at a meeting with Maj-Gen Aung Than Tut, Commander of the Burma Army's Northeastern Region Command at Lashio headquarters.

The military junta was reported to have planned to hold a ceremony to honor it officially at the SSA's Hsengkeow HQ, Hsipaw township, Shan State North, on the following day. But the plan failed as the group's other faction did not allow the Burmese delegation to enter in areas, said a source close to the group's leadership.

The group has reportedly yet to sign the agreement officially, he said. "It was just an oral acceptance. It appear the group is going to break up into two camps."

The SSA-N has 3 brigades (1, 3, 7), one border force and one HQ Security Force led by Maj-Gen Loimao. He is able to give orders only to brigades 3 and 7. Its paramount leader Maj Gen Hso Ten is serving a 106 year jail sentence in Khamti.

The 1st Brigade is based in Wanhai, Kehsi township, Shan State South, under the command of Maj-Gen Parnnga; Brigade No.3 in Mongkhurh, Mongyai township, Shan State North, under the command of Maj-Gen Loimao; Brigade No.7 in Kali, Hsipaw township, Shan State North, led by Maj-Gen Gaifa.

The First Brigade is the strongest with approximately 2,500 fully armed strength and its commander Maj-Gen Parnnga is reported as a hardliner.

The faction that has refused to transform is the 1st Brigade. It is said to join hands with other ethnic ceasefire armies that still remain defiant to the BGF program: the United Wa State Army (UWSA), National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a source said.

Maj-Gen Aung Than Tut was reported to have said that the remaining groups have also accepted the proposal on the same day with the SSA.

“No need to worry for the remaining brigade of your group, the 1st brigade. It will be following your footsteps soon,” Aung Than Tut was said to have told Maj-Gen Loimao.

But the Wa, Mongla and Kachin replied that they were not aware of the commander saying so and they have yet to give their consent.

In the meantime, unconfirmed sources said that the 7th brigade’s leader Maj-Gen Gaifa is reported to be preparing to contest the general elections with the group’s former political arm, Shan State Progress Party (SSPP).

An official report from the SSA-North says the Brigade was marking the founding of the first SSA on 24 April 1964.

[Ethnic armed groups silent over junta’s BGF proposal](#)

KNG - 26 April 2010

Though the deadline by the Burmese military junta has expired, ethnic armed groups with ceasefire agreements with the regime are not responding to its Border Guard Force proposal.

The Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army-KNU/KNLA Peace Council, which split from the mother organization KNU in 2007, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and Kachin Independence Organization are silent on the BGF issue through the April 22 deadline has passed.

“We have nothing more to say on the issue. “There will never be an agreement between us,” said a senior UWSA officer on condition of anonymity.

The UWSA submitted a 9-point counter-proposal, including control of more territory and self governance, which was rejected by the junta.

“We are keeping track of what they are doing,” said the officer. If the Burmese Army launches a military offensive, “we have to defend ourselves but we will not attack first”, he added.

KIO delegates headed by Chairman Lanyaw Zawng Hra met Northern Burma Regional Commander Maj-Gen Soe Win in Myitkyina the capital of Kachin State over the BGF issue on April 22, where the ethnic armed group spoke of alternative means to resolve the deadlock trying to pre-empt a military conflict, said a source close to KIO.

The KNU/KNLA Peace Council rejected the junta proposed transformation to a Militia Group by sending a letter to the regime on April 22.

“I would like to clarify to you that no matter what name you come up with, we will not agree or respond to any kind of military programme, which disturbs the peace and security of the lives of our Karen people,”

said the Chairman of KNU/KNLA Peace Council Gen. Htay Maung in the letter to the junta's Lt. Gen Ye Myint, Chief of Military Intelligence.

"Moreover, you are going against your own policy and propaganda in TV and your newspapers," the General wrote.

The Peace Council has accused the junta of oppression of their people, which is contrary to the propaganda in the state run media, which talks of development, peace and stability in the country ushered in by the regime.

Saw David Takapaw, Vice-President of the KNU said the rejection of the BGF is related to the distrust the ethnic armed groups have for the junta.

"They (junta) are the kind you cannot trust no matter what they say," he told KNG. "The ethnic armed groups want to maintain peace and keep their arms."

The BGF issue has worsened the situation for armed groups and there are no opportunities and rights of the ethnic people in such policies of the junta, he said.

"Everything will go under the control of the junta if the armed groups transform to BGF and they have to serve under the command of the Burmese Army. So it is not possible for them to accept," said the Vice President of KNU, whose armed wing the KNLA, has been fighting Burmese troops since 1949.

War Fears Push Up Prices in Tachilek

Irrawaddy - 26 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

The price of commodities, especially food, has risen sharply in the Burmese border trade town of Tachilek as local people stock up in preparation of an outbreak in hostilities between the Burmese government forces and the United Wa State Army (UWSA).

Fears of a conflict have increased since a deadline passed on April 22 for the UWSA to join the military government's border guard force plan.

A local source said that one kilo of onions or garlic has gone up from 20 baht (US \$0.62) last week to 28 baht (\$0.87). One kilo of red beans on Monday was priced at 100 baht (\$3.10), whereas last week it cost 60 baht (\$1.86).

However, he said, the price of rice has to date remained constant.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, a businessman in Tachilek, which borders Thailand, said, "Local people believe war will break out soon because the Burmese army has deployed tanks and artillery around the town. So, they are stocking up on food."

The Burmese military has recently deployed tanks and artillery in Mongton, Mong Saik and Tachilek townships, he said.

A police source in Tachilek said, "I heard that the authorities will block all transportation routes to Mongton, Mong Saik and Tachilek townships on April 28.

He said some people from those townships are preparing to move temporarily to the Thai side of the border to avoid the conflict.

According to the *Shan Herald Agency for News*, based in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, the Burmese government forces exchanged fire twice last week with Wa troops. However, the government forces reportedly claimed they had mistaken the UWSA soldiers for Shan State Army-South troops.

An ethnic alliance comprising the UWSA, the Kachin Independence Organization, the Kokang army (officially called the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army), the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army and the Shan State Army-North, held a meeting last week to discuss joint-security measures in the event of war.

26/04/2010

News - Elections

[EU to urge Myanmar junta to accept pre-election mission](#)

AFP – 24 April 2010

BRUSSELS — The EU hopes to send an "exploratory mission" to Myanmar to discuss with the military junta the country's upcoming elections, despite controversial voting laws, a diplomatic source said Friday.

The European Union also calls on Myanmar's military leaders "to cooperate fully" with Piero Fassino, its special envoy to the country, in a text approved by representatives of the 27 European Union nations which will be formally adopted by EU foreign ministers on Monday.

The ministers will express "serious concerns" at new Myanmar election laws published last month which "do not provide for free and fair elections", according to the text seen by AFP.

The National League for Democracy (NLD), party of Myanmar's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, is boycotting this year's legislative polls, the first for 20 years, as it would have been forced to oust its iconic leader and recognise the junta's constitution if it had signed up.

"The EU believes that despite everything there is room for manoeuvre," the European diplomat said.

"But we are only prepared to go there if we are received at the highest level. We are not prepared to be humiliated."

The NLD risk being dissolved by the Myanmar junta if they do not take part in the polls which are set to take place by the end of November.

Suu Kyi's NLD were the main winners in the last elections in 1990, but the military junta, in power since 1962, refused to recognise those results.

Since then the Nobel Peace prize winner has spent much of the time under house arrest.

The United States has led international condemnation of laws Myanmar has enacted for the ballot, the first in the military-run country in two decades, which effectively bar Aung San Suu Kyi from participating.

Last month the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution expressing concern that election laws failed to include the necessary elements to guarantee an inclusive political process.

[EU to adopt Burma election statement](#)

DVB - 26 April 2010

By Francis Wade

The European Union is today due to formally adopt a statement in which it expresses "serious concern" about elections in Burma this year whilst eyeing the possibility of sending a senior delegation to meet with the ruling generals.

A diplomatic source told AFP that the EU will urge the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to accept the "exploratory mission", although didn't elaborate on the specifics of the visit, nor the proposed date.

The statement also calls on Burma's military leaders "to cooperate fully" with Piero Fassino, the bloc's special envoy to the country.

Various members of the EU have individually criticised election laws which effectively block the country's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), from running, but this is the first collective statement released since the laws were announced in March.

“The EU believes that despite everything there is room for manoeuvre,” the European diplomat said. “But we are only prepared to go there if we are received at the highest level. We are not prepared to be humiliated.”

The comment likely refers to Than Shwe, the reclusive ruling general who often avoids contact with foreign diplomats visiting Burma. The source may also be hinting at a meeting with detained NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose strict house arrest rules bar her from contact with outsiders, although this was lifted temporarily last year when she met with US senator Jim Webb.

The EU [announced in December](#) last year that it would begin “sustained political dialogue” with the Burmese junta, following a similar announcement by the US. Washington has since expressed regret at the apparent lack of progress made by the junta, particularly in light of the restrictive election laws.

The EU’s decision to break with years of isolation came in the wake of Fassino’s trip to the country in November, in which he reported that a “window of opportunity” appeared to have opened which should not be missed by concerned countries.

But the laws have sparked international outrage, with many Western countries offering their support for the NLD’s decision not to participate in the polls. [Nineteen political parties](#) have so far registered for the elections, none of which are outwardly in opposition to the incumbent government.

The majority of parties are members of the so-called ‘third force’, allied to neither the opposition nor the military government, although many are believed to hold ties to the ruling generals.

With critics deriding the elections as a sham intended to cement military rule in Burma under the guise of a civilian government, it remains uncertain what level of input or leverage these parties will hold.

[NLD youth leaders gear up for post May 6 days](#)

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – Gearing up for activities after the junta’s deadline to register as a political party expires on May 6, and the National League for Democracy (NLD) ceases to be a political entity, youth leaders made field visits to 60 townships to explain the party’s position.

The NLD did not re-register with the Election Commission after deciding not to contest the elections because it was of the view that the electoral laws were ‘unjust and unfair.’

The Party Youth Works Implementation Task Force visited Kachin, Shan, Sagaing, Mandalay, Pegu and Irrawaddy Divisions and States in the last two weeks. It held wide ranging discussions with people about its planned social work and activities.

“The main purpose of our visit was to maintain unity till the time Auntie Suu (Daw Aung San Suu Kyi) is released from house arrest and also to avoid erosion of our party strength. We can be involved in social work. They may close our offices. They may remove our party signboards but we must maintain communication with party members,” Aye Tun, In-charge (3) of the task force, who was part of the organizational tour, told Mizzima.

“We will keep our communication channel open with youth members, hold on to our party member strength and avoid disarray in the party ranks. We are coordinating and discussing these. We explained our future plans to party members from township, ward and village tract levels invited by States and Divisions Organizing Committees. The organization shall remain and we shall continue to work,” he added.

After it ceases to exist as a political party after May 6, NLD plans to plunge headlong into social work and activities including caring for HIV/AIDS patients, a youth NLD member from Mandalay Division said.

“Despite losing its legal status and party signboard, NLD will continue its routine work and activities. Party members will continue to work as they would have done if they were in their current party positions,” he said.

NLD had 22 million party members in its heyday and its youth members are in the age group of 18 to 35. The youth wing of the party influences the NLD's decision making process. The youth leaders also plan to visit remaining States and Divisions.

The party, grappling with how to maintain unity and continue party activities in an unified manner, has become a subject of discussion among party members and observers.

UDP said junta-backed parties will be the main rivals

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

By Min Thet

Rangoon – The junta-backed parties will be the main rivals of the Union Democracy Party if it is permitted to contest the forthcoming election, the party's chairman has predicted.

He expressed his opinion at the party's press conference about its registration with the Election Commission on U Chit Maung Road, Bahan Township, Rangoon on Friday.

To be a free and fair election, political prisoners should be released, the election process should be inclusive, the media should be free and international election watchdogs should be allowed to enter the country and monitor the polls, former political prisoner Phyo Min Thein said.

Despite the military junta keeping its political allies' election plans secret, three junta-backed political parties will be formed including Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA, its logo will still be a lion) and the National Progressive Party, a USDA leader told Mizzima.

The military junta would encourage its cronies to register political parties and then would monitor the other parties closely, a Division-level leader of USDA said.

USDA leaders believe that they will win in the forthcoming election.

The political parties, 88 Generation Students (Union of Myanmar) and Union of Myanmar National Political Force have been registered and allowed to run, the state mouthpiece, The New Light of Myanmar, reported today.

The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, has decided against re-registering because it cannot accept the junta's unfair electoral laws. Burmese opposition groups in exile have urged the people to boycott the forthcoming election.

Sixteen new political parties and three existing political parties had registered to contest in this year's election, the date of which has yet to be announced.

One seat for us would benefit Shan State, new party says

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

By Khaing Suu

New Delhi – A new ethnic Shan party believes winning even a single seat in the forthcoming election would be to Shan State's advantage, Shan Nationalities Democratic Party officials said, explaining why they are joining the tough race.

The party had registered with the Election Commission at Nay Pyi Taw on April 8 and will contest in 44 Townships of the 55 in Shan State and some Townships of States or Divisions, the party's chairman said.

"We will contest both Shan States and some other States or Divisions where there are Shan nationalities. We will contest in the constituencies where there are possibilities that we can win," party chairman Sai Eik Wawn, 65, told Mizzima. "When the new government is formed, even if we can take one seat in parliament, we will be able to act for the benefit of Shan State and the whole country."

The former general secretary of the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) is also a salt merchant and owns coffee farms. Vice-chairman is Sai Saung Si who was elected to Parliament for Kyauk Mae (2) constituency in the 1990 election.

Sai Eik Wawn is a former teacher and a patron of the Shan Literature and Culture Association. He is well known and well regarded among Shan people in Rangoon. But, his former party, the SNLD, declared that it would consider taking part in the forthcoming election only if the junta released the party's leaders, who were sentenced to long prison term.

SNLD won 23 seats out of 485 constituencies in which voting was held in 1990 so the party could seize the second place after the NLD (392 seats).

The headquarters of Shan Nationalities Democratic Party will be in Rangoon and the party said it would have the required number of party members on time, its chairman said. The Pa-O National Organisation, and the Palaung National and Wa Democratic parties have already registered.

There are 55 townships in Shan State. They include six townships in the USDA's self-administered zone, three in the Pa-O's, two in the Palaung's, two in the Kokant's and two in the Da Nu's.

Mara ethnics to be represented by NPP in polls

Khonumthung News - 26 April 2010

The Mara ethnics in Chin state will be represented by the National Progressive Party (NPP) in the forthcoming elections in Burma. The decision was taken in a meeting in the second week of April.

The party's decision was taken at a meeting attended by hundreds of Mara people in Lailenpi village, Matupi Township between April 10 and 13.

"We had a crucial discussion on whether to contest as a political party or fight as Independents in the polls. Finally after threadbare debate we decided to participate as a political entity called the NPP in the forthcoming elections," said a local teacher, who attended the meeting.

NPP members elected a Chairman and 14 executive committee members. However, the NPP has to register with the Election Commission of Burma in order to contest the polls.-

CPP requests former CNF commander not to contest

Khonumthung News - 26 April 2010

Expressing their reservations about Mr. Nothankap, a former Chin National Front (CNF) acting army chief commander, some leaders of the Chin Progressive Party (CPP) have asked him not to contest in the forthcoming general elections in Burma.

"The reason is not because they hate him but his past record of activities could hurt the party. So, some leaders requested him not to contest the election," said a CPP official in Falam Township, Chin state.

Mr. Nothankap, however, has not responded to the appeal. Mr. Nothankap's presence in the electoral fray will not be acceptable as the local people don't like him. This in turn will make the CPP unacceptable to the people, said a local.

Mr. Nothankap was expelled from the Chin National Front when he was acting army chief commander.

Although Mr. Nothankap believes that the elections will not be free and fair, he says he will try to help poor people in Chin state by contesting from the Falam Township constituency.

Meanwhile, the CPP is trying to nominate reputed candidates as representatives of Chin people and is trying to shun persons, who have a record of misbehaviour during the period of Burma Socialist Party (BSP).

News - BGF

Burma army shoots Wa

SHAN - 25 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

Burmese military junta has begun to launch the military attacks on the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the 171st Military Region based along the Thai-Burma border in southern Shan State.

The first attack took place about 15 minutes long in the evening on 23 April, and the second attack occurred about 10 minutes, at yesterday's morning at 10:00am.

Both of the attacks took place in Monghsat Township, Southeastern Shan State, opposite to Thai's Mae Ai district, said a Wa leader who asked not to be named.

UWSA resisted by attacking back to the Burmese military. "They fired to us first, and we fired them back because we have to defend ourselves," said a Wa officer.

A Wa leader said that there was no casualty on their side.

But the casualties on the Burmese Army's side were not known.

Burmese army has shown that they were unaware of the troop that they attack. "The fighting stopped when we spoke out Wa language", a Wa officer said.

The Burmese army came to apologize to the UWSA that they have attacked on the wrong group which they thought it was the Shan State Army (SSA) 'South'.

But the Wa leader said, it was unacceptable that the Burmese army did not aware of the troop they attack.

"It is nonsense that they said it was the wrong attack. Their intention is to fire directly to us. And they also know that our troop have been spreading and moving around these areas for more than ten years"

Wa believe that the Burmese attack was link to the Border Guard Force (BGF) program which the deadline was 22 April, and UWSA did not give any response except its latest 8 point counterproposals which has sent to Naypitaw on 3 April, but was turned down by the junta.

Follow by the Naypitaw's BGF program, the war between the ceasefires groups and the Burmese junta can break out at anytime, said a Wa leader.

The Southern UWSA military based area, and also known as the 171st Military Region, spreading along the Mongton and Tachilek townships in southern Shan State, opposite to Maehongson, Chiangmai and Chiangrai of Thailand.

Wa flee in fear of Junta attack

SHAN - 24 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

Wa flee to jungle along the Thai-Burma border in fear of military attack by the Burmese Army, for refusing to accept Naypitaw's 'Border Guard Force' program which has reached the setup deadline on 22 April.

Wa villagers and some families members of the southern based United Wa State Army (UWSA), the 171 Military Regions based along the Thai-Burma border, have been fleeing to jungle and some are entering into Thai's border towns since last week, according to a local sources from Nakawngmu in southern Shan State's Mongton township, , opposite Chiangmai's Chiangdao district.

The UWSA's 171 Military Region comprises five brigades, spreading along the Mongton and Tachilek townships in southern Shan State, opposite to Maehongson, Chiangmai and Chiangrai of Thailand.

"They are fleeing during the night, they are moving in the dark and no one is allowed to use the light", said a local villager from Nakawngmu in Mongton township opposite to Chiangdao district.

Most local residents in Mongton and Tachilek believe that the Wa's fleeing to the jungle and Thai's border is related to the setup deadline from Naypitaw, for the ceasefire groups to response their agreement on whether they will transform to the border guard force.

But there is no sign of any Burmese military deployment along the Wa's areas. "There are no significant military actions from the Burmese Army" said a villager.

A few days ago, Maj-Gen Kyaw Phyoe, commander of Golden Triangle Region Command has ordered the Wa officers from the region to meet him and Lt-Gen Ye Myint, chief of Military Affairs Security (MAS) in Monghsat, said another villager from Pongpakhem.

But the top ranked Wa officers are not planning meet the Burmese military, "they are not going to meet the Burmese military commanders. They will let their representatives to meet them" said a villager.

The Naypitaw has announced on earthy this month that if ceasefires groups do not response to regarding the agreement or disagreement on the BGF program, they will automatically be recognised as the outlaw groups.

But the Panghsang, from the headquarters of UWSA have said there would be no further response from them. UWSA had already sent its latest 8 point counterproposals on 9 April, but was turned down by the junta.

Similarly, other ceasefire groups such as National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) known as Mongla group, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Shan State Army (SSA) 'North' are also have given the same response.

Follow by the Naypitaw announcement on BGF program, ceasefires groups have become more united in confronting toward the Burmese military.

In the mean time, Mongla is reinforcing more troops and keep preparing supplies and foods at its bases, said a local source.

On 18 April, Col Than Htut Thein, Staff Officer Grade 1, of the Triangle Region Command has met the Mongla officers over the BGF program. Mongla was reported to have told the Burma Army officers that it would only submit its previous 6 point proposal, which was turned down by Naypyitaw. The group would have no response, if it would be turned down again, according to an informed source who asked not to be named.

No further details were reported.

Ceasefires groups have only two choices, accept or refuse the BGF program said a border analyst from the Sino-Burma border who requested to remain in anonymous.

But he said that Burmese military may not attack on ceasefires groups. "The Burmese junta may not attack because it needs to prepare for the forthcoming elections. The main point is it doesn't want to make internationals' attention".

Another reason of its reluctant to attack is that it may consider its neighbour country China. Recently, China has requested that it wants its border security stability.

[Karen Peace Council Rejects BGF Proposal](#)

Irrawaddy - 24 April 2010

By Alex Ellgee

The Karen Peace Council (KPC) once again rejected the Burmese military government's border guard force (BGF) proposal.

Maj-Gen Htain Maung and the other leaders of the KPC sent a seven-page letter to the Burmese military chief of intelligence outlining why they rejected the proposal.

"We have not written this letter to attack the government," Dr. Timothy, a KPC leader, told *The Irrawaddy*. "We want to raise a voice for the Karen people and tell the SPDC the effects these militia programs have

on the people. We hope by sending them a letter they will understand our position—we are the first ethnic group to really open up to the SPDC.”

The letter stated that in an April 7 meeting in Moulmein, capital of Mon State, between Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the chief of Military Affairs Security, and the KPC executive committee members, pressure was put on the KPC to become a “Burma Army Militia Group,” the junta’s latest name for the ethnic cease-fire groups who join the BGF.

In response, the KPC said in its letter that whatever name the government gives to the BGF, they will still reject the proposal.

The KPC cited the problems the BGF is already causing in Karen State as its main reason for rejecting the proposal.

“Your Border Guard Force program is disturbing the peaceful lives of the people and creating poverty, fear, insecurity and panic among the villagers,” the letter said.

According to the KPC, once other groups accepted the BGF proposal the junta began recruiting men from villages, demanding that five to 10 men from each village become members of the BGF. Families that did not comply were forced to pay heavy fines.

According to Dr. Timothy, Ye Myint’s arrogant conduct in the meeting with the KPC—during which he told the KPC not to increase their army, not to contact other ethnic groups, not to meet with the Karen National Union (KNU) and not to have a relationship with Thailand, nor to trust them—also affected the KPC’s decision.

“He talked to us forcefully and lacking sincerity, like a soldier rather than a negotiator, so we are unable to move forward and truly let the Karen people benefit from the peace we have made,” Dr. Timothy said.

The military government has stated that any ethnic cease-fire group not accepting the BGF proposal by April 22 will thereafter be considered illegal.

Dr. Timothy said that if the KPC is outlawed the group will attempt to respond peacefully, but will defend itself as a last resort. He reported that government troops have been building military posts in the KPC-controlled area and bringing in heavy artillery.

The KPC was formed in February 2007 when commanders in the seventh brigade region of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the military wing of the KNU, brokered a peace deal with the government to end fighting in their area and then split off from the KNLA.

The KPC now has 2,000 troops and is based in Hto Kaw Koo village in Pa-an District in Karen State.

Ethnic Rebel Groups Defy Junta’s Order

Irrawaddy – 24 April 2010

By Marwaan Macan-Markar / IPS Writer

BANGKOK — Burma’s military regime is facing a formidable challenge from ethnic rebel groups that are refusing to kowtow to its order that they join the Southeast Asian country’s army as border guard forces.

The junta’s order that the five armed groups in the country’s northern and eastern borders meet an Apr. 28 deadline is a test of how far the oppressive regime can flex its political muscle ahead of a promised general election later this year.

For now, at least, the defiance showed by the ethnic groups—the most powerful of which is the United Wa State Army (UWSA) that has a troop strength of over 20,000—confirms the limits of the junta’s political powers, say analysts. After all, the latest deadline is the fifth since April last year, when the junta first ordered armed minority groups to transform into a border guard force.

"The failure to get these ceasefire groups to transform reveals the limits of the military," said Win Min, a Burmese national security expert at Payap University in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. "The military is not as capable as many people think. It reveals political weakness."

The pressure will mount on the Burmese government if this deadline is ignored, Win Min revealed in an interview. "The new constitution states that the country will have one army under one command, so the presence of armed ethnic groups undermines this provision in the constitution."

The military-backed charter is due to come into force when the new parliament sits following the regime's promised 2010 general election. Approved in a fraud-riddled referendum riddled in 2008, the constitution sets out language to absorb the armed ethnic groups as border guard forces under the wing of the powerful Burmese military.

The army in Burma, or Myanmar as it is also called, has an estimated troop strength of 400,000. The total troop strength of the ethnic fighters defying the regime is estimated at close to 45,000.

Besides the UWSA, the other four ethnic rebel groups are the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the National Democratic Alliance Army and the Shan State Army-North.

A meeting this week of all five groups sent another message to the junta that the ethnic minority fighters are not ready for change. The UWSA met with its ethnic allies "to discuss the potential threats they face in the near future," reported *'The Irrawaddy'*, a current affairs website run by Burmese journalists in exile in Thailand.

"(The ethnic groups) are preparing a united front against any threats to the development and stability of their territories," *'The Irrawaddy'* quoted a source as saying in its Apr. 22 edition.

Some of the ethnic minorities are even preparing for a potential military confrontation with Burmese troops over the contentious border guard programme.

"The situation is getting critical. The KIO is ready to fight, but it will not be the first to shoot," said Naw Din Lahpai, editor of *'Kachin News'*, a publication by Kachin journalists in exile. "They will resist this disarmament plan of the Burmese regime aimed to eliminate all armed ethnic groups."

The resistance to the regime's push for the armed minority fighters to give up control of the land they hold in regions close to the Burmese border with China, India and Thailand stems from the "lack of ethnic rights in the constitution," Naw Din told IPS. "The constitution discriminates against minorities. It doesn't guarantee minority rights."

The ethnic alliance standing up to the regime is part of 17 ethnic groups that began signing ceasefire agreements with the military regime since 1989. The peace pacts did not call for the transformation of the ethnic fighters into border guard forces or deliver a form of political autonomy to the ethnic minorities.

The Burmese military has been waging battles with the country's ethnic separatists since gaining independence from the British in 1948. The military's mission since then has been to unify the country under the authority of the majority Burman ethnic community.

Burma has some 130 ethnic communities that make up over 40 percent of the country's 56 million population. The military, which has ruled the country since a 1962 coup, has been linked to a range of gross human rights violations, including the use of rape as a weapon of war, during its military campaigns to flush out ethnic rebels.

The separatist fighters from the Karen, an ethnic minority living close to the Burmese-Thai border, have withstood such onslaughts and turned down peace pacts with the regime. The Karen National Union (KNU) has also rejected the idea of the border guard force ahead of the election, which the rebel movement states will "legalise a dictatorship."

"We will not support the elections nor have we supported the 2008 constitution since there is nothing hopeful for ethnic minorities," said Zipporah Sein, the KNU's general secretary. "It is an effort to maintain military power in Burma."

"Ethnic people want a federal constitution unlike the current constitution, which is for a very centralized state," the KNU's first female leader told IPS during a telephone interview from the Thai-Burma border. "Burma will not have a democracy under the current conditions."

Mon Reject Militia Plan

Irrawaddy – 23 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

The Mon cease-fire group, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), announced at a press conference on Friday evening that the party has rejected both the junta's border guard force (BGF) and militia proposals.

Speaking at a conference in Sangkhalaburi in western Thailand, Nai Chay Mon, the spokesman of the NMSP, told delegates: "We sent a letter to Regional Southeast Command on April 22 stating that we will not accept the militia offer. This is a difficult time to transform our troops, because our people do not yet have any rights.

"If the Burmese army uses force, we will have to defend ourselves," he said.

"We will maintain the cease-fire and we will be open to discussions about transforming our troops at some time in the future when there is a democratic government, elected by the people," he said.

The NMSP central executive committee and the central committee held a meeting on Wednesday at their jungle headquarters when the leaders made a decision to move their troops out of urban areas into the jungle, according to a source.

Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the junta's chief negotiator, reportedly told NMSP leaders at a meeting on April 7: "If you don't accept the militia plan [an order to station Mon soldiers as security guards in Mon villages], war will break out like it did in 1989."

The NMSP leaders have reportedly ordered their troops not to shoot first; however, if Burmese government forces open fire on them, they should return fire.

Nai Hang Thar, the secretary of the NMSP, said, "Our revolution will never weaken. We will wage guerrilla warfare against the Burmese army if conflict breaks out.

"If there is no democracy and ethnic rights in Burma, they cannot be another political step. These are the root causes of the conflict in Burma."

Several observers have said that the Burmese government forces can easily contain the Mon troops in combat, as the Mon have only 700 regular troops while the Burmese army can call on up to 400,000 soldiers.

Nai Kao Rot, the former deputy of the Mon National Liberation Army, said, "I advise the NMSP not to fight a defensive war. Don't set up bases. If they (government forces) come to our area, let them. We will attack them outside the towns at their own bases."

He added: "Our revolution will never end while Mon people live and breathe. Even if the NMSP fails to win this conflict, the Mon people will rise again."

Many analysts say the Mon soldiers are not sufficiently battle-hardened as they have not fought since the cease-fire 15 years ago.

Officially, the NMSP has 3,500 members, though perhaps only 700 currently serve as soldiers. The party leaders said they hope that many of their members will come back and join them if war breaks out.

Although hundreds of Mon officials and soldiers are preparing to leave their homes to retreat to jungle base camps, observers have predicted that many NMSP members will not abandon their property and livelihoods. However, they expect Mon refugees and many Mon living in Thailand will join up to support the ethnic army in the event of war.

The junta has set a deadline of April 28 for the cease-fire groups to accept the BGF plan, or be declared illegal organizations.

Tension has increased between the NMSP and the Burmese military since the Mon rejected the regime's order to transform its army into a BGF last year.

In March, the NMSP moved some of its administration and a stockpile of weapons to a new undisclosed base, a source close to the group said.

The NMSP signed a cease-fire agreement with the regime in 1995. After 15 years of cease-fire, government forces have about 30 battalions in Mon State. Before the cease-fire, there were about 10 battalions.

The Burmese regime recently deployed three battalions near the NMSP headquarters in Ye Township.

News - Other

[Suu Kyi wades into Thailand crisis](#)

DVB - 26 April 2010

By Francis Wade

Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has drawn the ire of Thai politicians after claiming that the country's instability resulted from a constitution that was drawn up by the military.

She reportedly told lawyer Nyan Win that Burma "need not look very far" to see that "a new government coming to power under a constitution drawn up by the military will never be stable," according to AFP.

"We just see Thailand. [Former prime minister] Thaksin was an elected person. The military seized the power from an elected person. The constitution was drawn up by the military."

"After that, what happened with the first [government]? It was not stable," she said of the short-lived administration that followed the coup. "This was a result of the constitution being written by the military."

Thailand is currently in the grip of its worst political instability in years, with pro-Thaksin 'red shirt' protestors blockading key areas of Bangkok's financial district. A fortnight ago 25 people, including nine soldiers, died after clashes between red shirts and the army.

Current prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has refused to dissolve parliament, the red shirts' key demand, as fears grow of another outbreak in violence. Thai troops stationed near to the red shirt encampment have been permitted by Abhisit to use live ammunition against protestors.

Meanwhile, Burma is due to go to the polls later this year, despite criticism that the 2008 constitution, rushed through by the junta in the wake of cyclone Nargis in May 2008, is intended to cement military rule.

Suu Kyi's apparent support for the red shirts has angered the upper echelons of the Thai government, whose grip on power is now looking tenuous.

Thai news agency Matichon quoted a Thai senator as saying that he was "so very disappointed" with the comments "because Mrs Aung San Suu Kyi should understand Thailand better".

He also reportedly demanded that an "audit of the financial path" to Suu Kyi be made public to see whether she had "received support from anyone," likely a reference to Thaksin.

Thai government spokesperson Panitan Wattan added that Thailand has had a "democratic system for a long time when other countries have never been democratic", despite Thailand suffering 18 coups since 1930.

Thaksin's relations with the Burmese junta during his five years in power are also controversial. During his recent court case he was accused of providing Burma with a \$US120 million low-interest credit line, in part to purchase equipment and services from his Shin Corp company.

Shin Corp in 2003 also signed a multi-million dollar deal with Bagan Cybertech, an internet service provider headed by the son of former prime minister, Khin Nyunt.

Thaksin is also known to have offered financial rewards to red shirt protestors actively opposing the current Thai government, which may be the reason behind the Thai senator's accusation that Suu Kyi is on his payroll.

[Police hold 7 youths amid post-blast crackdown](#)

Mizzima - 25 April 2010

Chiang Mai - Seven suspected "activists" in their 20s and 30s have been arrested in central Rangoon amid a security crackdown following blasts during New Year celebrations. Another youth evaded arrest, police and neighbours said.

About 60 armed police raided the home of the youths at No. 29, Ground Floor, 1st Street, Northern Kunchan Block 4, Kamayut near Hledan junction just after midnight on Saturday morning. They seized three mobile phones and sealed the room.

Officers at divisional and township police stations confirmed the arrests. They called it a political case but declined to give details as their superiors were handling the matter and that they lacked the authority to release information.

"Some guys were half-naked, just wearing shorts because they [apparently] were asleep" a neighbour told Mizzima.

Sources who requested anonymity for safety reasons told Mizzima the detainees were Bo Bo Thein, Thaug Htike Oo, Tin Tun, Soe Moe Kyaw, Saw Yin Shin, Thaw Zin, Aung Aung. Police continue to search for at least one of the youths, known as Kyaw Maung Oo.

Neighbours close to local authorities said police were monitoring the young men for at least a week prior to the raid.

"They were living here by sharing room rent. I have never heard of their indecent activity or wild behaviour," a neighbour told Mizzima.

Since three serial blasts in Burma's commercial capital went off at a pavilion built for Buddhist New Year water-festival celebrations, police investigations and arrest reports are increasing amid a security crackdown gripping the country. Journalist Maung Zeya and his son Sithu Zeya were detained on April 17 for taking pictures at the scene of the explosions on April 15.

A military engineer from the team investigating the blasts told Mizzima three hand grenades thrown into crowds at the pavilion were behind the blasts that killed 10 people, the majority of whom were security personnel from the army and the Home Ministry. About 170 people were injured.

[Burma Envoy Meets with Bangladesh on Border Fence](#)

Narinjara News – 24 April 2010

Dhaka: Burma formally explained on Friday to Bangladesh that it is erecting barbed-wire fencing along sensitive border areas outside of the designated no-man's land area, according to a UNB report.

Burmese Ambassador in Dhaka, U Phae Than Oo, gave his government's explanation to Bangladesh State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Hasan Mahmud, at the Foreign Ministry of Bangladesh during a 35-minute meeting.

The ambassador told reporters after the meeting that the construction of fencing from south to north along the border has already begun. The closest the fence gets to no-man's land is 50 yards, and the farthest is 1,000 yards.

"This is for mutual benefit of the two close neighbors," he said, adding that this is not a defense structure and the fencing is intended to stop illegal smuggling, drug trafficking, and human trafficking along the border.

On the reported military buildup along the Bangladesh-Burma border, the envoy stated that Nasaka is not a border force, but a unit constituted of officials from customs, immigration, police, and army to look after law and order, immigration and border trade, the report said.

The ambassador also stated that this is not only good for Burma, but also for Bangladesh, and Burma is a friend of Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh state minister did not make any comments to the press after the meeting, but told reporters on Monday that if the fence is erected 100 meters inside Burma from the zero point, that it would be "within diplomatic norms", and they would have no concerns.

A senior official from the foreign ministry said on condition of anonymity that they are satisfied with Burma's explanation regarding the site of the fencing.

On Monday, Bangladesh sought the official version from Burma on the fencing as confusion arose after Rangoon gave conflicting information about the location of the border fence.

Bangladesh and Burma have 168 miles of shared border, and the Burmese military authorities are constructing fence along a 40-mile stretch.

According to other local sources, Burma has already completed 40 miles of fencing along the Naff River in Maungdaw Township, but another 40 miles is being constructed in no-man's land in northern Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships.

The official said a Bangladesh delegation led by the commerce secretary will attend a two-day Joint Trade Commission meeting in Burma on 7 - 8 May to discuss various issues concerning the border trade, banking facilities, and contract farming.

In addition, foreign secretary-level consultations will be held in Dhaka in May and June to discuss the entire range of bilateral relation issues and cooperation.

[Thais top Burma investor, state news service reports](#)

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

By Usa Pichai

Chiang Mai – Thailand ranked first among country investors into Burma in the 10 years up to 2008, mainly is energy businesses, ahead of Britain and Singapore who apparently take second and third place.

Wassana Mututanond, Thailand's Board of Investment (BoI) investment advisor said Thailand had invested US\$7.41 billion in Burma between 1988 and last year, making it the top investor in Burma in terms of investment value, according to a report on the Thai News Agency website on Friday.

The greatest proportion of investment in Burma by Thailand was in the energy (electricity) sector at 81.7 per cent of total investment, with 8.33 per cent spent on the manufacturing industry and 3.1 per cent in the hotels and tourism.

"Industries that give Thai investors opportunities to invest in Myanmar include agriculture, processed foods, leather, precious stones and mining, and tourism," She added.

The BoI would conduct 13 events and activities locally and overseas in this fiscal year, she said, it would: provide information; consulting services; help form a state- and private-sector network; and set a forum for "business matching".

Thailand has major natural-gas development deals with Burma in the Andaman Sea in addition to hydroelectric dam projects. China is a joint developer on the latter.

Human rights groups have urged the Thai government to delay its mega-dam projects in Burma, and to play a stronger role within Asean to urge the Burmese junta to move towards democracy and human rights.

Samart Loifa, Tak province governor told a trading conference on Tuesday the province had plans to develop a route from Mae Sot, through Myawaddy and Moulmein to Rangoon which he claimed would benefit manufacturing investment, agricultural business and tourism.

Trading at the Mae Sot-Myawaddy border crossing had risen 49 per cent year to date compared with the same period last year, according to Mae Sot customs office director Pimkarn Lorsiripaiboon.

She added that in the first four months the total trade across this border was estimated at more than 10 billion baht (US\$300 million).

[New Zealand Senator against scholarships to Burmese junta employees](#)

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

By Sai Zuan Sai

Chiang Mai – Ms. Maryan Street, a New Zealand Senator has expressed her displeasure and has said today that she will try her utmost to stop her government providing scholarships to Burmese military government employees.

Her reaction came in the wake of a disclosure by New Zealand Foreign Minister Mr. Murray McCully that three Burmese government employees had arrived in the country for further studies. He also said that more will follow soon.

“We are concerned over giving scholarships to Burmese government staff members because it will provide them an opportunity to spy on Burmese dissidents here and be honoured when they go back home,” Ms. Maryan Street of the Opposition new Labour Party told Mizzima.

After severing official ties with Burma in 2008, the New Zealand Foreign Ministry decided to grant scholarships to Burmese government staff at the end of 2009, she said.

Ms. Street is also the Chairwoman of ‘Burma Cross-Party Parliamentary Group’ which is comprised of MPs from all political parties in New Zealand striving to restore democracy in Burma.

“We cannot accept giving such assistance to the military regime,” she said.

A six-month English course at the Autergo University costs USD 35,000 for each Burmese going over to study.

According to the Autergo Daily Times, 35 Burmese have studied in New Zealand since 1998.

Mr. Murry McCully defended his government’s policy of engagement with the military junta saying that it is just following the pro-engagement policy followed by the international community led by the US.

Opinion / Analysis

[Interview with KSPP leader : 'The Political Door is Opening'](#)

Irrawaddy – 26 April 2010

The Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP), based in Myitkyina, was formed in March 2009 by former leaders of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), which has a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese military regime.

Saw Yan Naing, an Irrawaddy correspondent, talks with KSPP leader Dr. Manan Tuja about the party's policies, tactics and the current situation in Kachin State. Manan Tuja is a former KIO vice-chairman.

Question: *What are your immediate plans in terms of the KSPP?*

Answer: We have already set up party committees in every township in Kachin State. We are beginning organizational activities among the people in all townships.

Q: *Will you campaign outside of Kachin State?*

A: At the moment, our activities will only be in Kachin State.

Q: *What are the KSPP's policies?*

A: We support and encourage a multi-party democratic system. We prefer a system in which democracy is practiced as a middle way, in a liberal tradition. We want to develop our state. When all the states become developed, the whole Union will be developed. We will work within our capacity. Now, we can see that the political door is opening a bit. On that basis, we will work realistically. We will promote education, health, the economy, religion, culture and literature for the people in Kachin State. We will also

preserve peace, unity, the environment and protect human rights. Our party will represent all walks of life in Kachin State. All people regardless of race and religion can participate in our party.

Q: *Will the party contest all areas of Kachin State?*

A: We will contest all constituencies in Kachin State. We will contest all three assemblies: the Upper, Lower and State levels.

Q: *How many seats do you expect to win?*

A: It is hard to say how many seats we will win. I hope we will win most of the seats, because all of us in Kachin State want to develop our state. The people will support those who are developing the state.

Q: *How many executive members and party members do you have?*

A: Before we submitted our party registration to the election committee, we had a meeting of headquarters and township representatives. All township representatives attended the meeting, not only only Kachin, but also Shan and Burman attended. Our central committee is comprised of 150 members. We also formed a central executive committee. According to our current list, we have about 3,000 party members. There will be more party members in the future.

Q: *What is your opinion on the NLD decision not to register to participate in the election?*

A: Every political party makes its own policies and decisions. Within a given situation, our aim is to form a political party and contest in the election. If you want to continue your political activities, you have to do that.

Q: *What do think the NLD should do?*

A: Well, the best way is to contest in the election. But it's their decision. I can not say more than that.

Q: *The KIO has rejected the border guard force order. Do you think the regime will move militarily against the KIO?*

A: It is difficult to say exactly what will happen. The government wants to continue to negotiate for a peaceful resolution.

Q: *What is your perspective on the building of hydro dams in Kachin State?*

A: Well, people are discussing that, and we hear people's views all the time. If the dams are going to be built, they shouldn't add to the people's problems.

23/04/2010

News

[US Congressman Calls For Burmese Military Revolt](#)

Irrawaddy – 23 April 2010

By Lalit K. Jha

WASHINGTON — US Congressman Dana Rohrabacher has urged “patriots” in the Burmese military to join pro-democracy advocates like Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic fighters to overthrow the military junta and restore democracy in Burma.

Speaking on the floor of the House of Representative, the California congressman said that patriots and freedom-loving people of Burma will either join against tyranny and foreign domination, or their country will be lost for generations to come.

“The time has come to choose,” Rohrabacher said. “ Let the Burmese, the ethnic people of Burma, the business and military leaders who long for a legitimate and honest government, and all of the other patriots there, let them have the courage to step forward and join together and retake their country. The time is now.”

Rohrabacher said there needs to be reconciliation between the Burmans and the ethnic groups who make up half of Burma's population, adding that in the decades-old insurgency the ethnic fighters have been the primary source of opposition to Burma's iron-fisted dictatorship.

"Urban democratic leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi and other patriotic Burmans have been beaten down and repressed and imprisoned. These two elements must come together, the Burmans and the ethnic groups that are fighting the Burmese dictatorship," Rohrabacher said. "They must come together as one under a banner promising respect for the rights and traditions of various people, those various people who make up the wonderfully diverse nation of Burma."

Rohrabacher appealed for members of the Burmese military to join the fight against the junta.

"An opposition coalition must be joined also by patriots in the military, professional soldiers who seek to remake their army into a respected defender of the nation, not a tool of corruption and foreign domination. It is time for leaders in the army to join the people and build a new, prosperous and free and, yes, independent Burma," Rohrabacher said.

"In the blink of an eye, Burma can reclaim its sovereignty and can be put on the path to national reconciliation, democracy, and, yes, prosperity. The military in a new Burma, as are professional armies throughout the democratic nations of the world, will be a respected institution, not a tool of foreign domination, repression and corruption," he said.

Drawing attention to the history of the plight of the people of Burma, Rohrabacher recounted how shortly after World War II Burma was granted its independence from Great Britain. At that time, with democratic institutions in place, rich natural resources and an educated population, it was expected that Burma would become a wealthy, stable and free country.

"Sadly, that country, with so much potential, has been dominated by corrupt tyrants. And despite its vast natural wealth, its people suffer in abject poverty," Rohrabacher said.

He said the people of Burma are actually losing their country to a foreign power—China.

"A Chinese power grab is not only depleting and stealing Burma's natural resources, but slowly and surely, Burma is being turned into a subservient province of Beijing," Rohrabacher said. "China is literally stealing Burma from its own people, and it is accomplishing this monumental crime with the assistance of Burmese government officials whose lust for power is greater than any loyalty to their own national homeland."

"This is a great moment of opportunity," Rohrabacher said. "People of Burma, do not let this moment pass by. The world will celebrate with you as you recapture your nation. We are on your side."

[KIO repeats 'No' to border force offer](#)

Mizzima - 22 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai – Kachin Independence Organisation passed a junta deadline today and reaffirmed its rejection of the regime's offer to bring its troops under the command of the Burmese Army's Border Guard Force.

Four junta representatives including Northern Command chief Major General Soe Win and Colonel Thet Pone from Military Affairs Security met an eight-member Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) team that included KIO Chairman Layauk Zauhara, General Secretary Dr. La Ja and Vice-Chief of Staff Colonel Guan Mau at Northern Command Headquarters this morning for about 1½ hours. In this meeting, the KIO refused to accept the junta's offer to transform their army into BGF.

"We told them we could not accept their offer at all. Both the Kachin people and our grass-roots level KIO members could not accept the BGF", one of the delegates at the meeting told Mizzima.

The KIO reiterated that it would adhere to its stance of joining the Federal Army as Kachin battalions.

Soe Win responded that he would convey KIO's reply to Naypyidaw, the delegate said.

KIO Joint General Secretary Colonel Sin Wah said the group wanted to reach a resolution to the stand-off without violence. "Whether the government is attacking us or not is up to them. We cannot comment on it. We just want to resolve the crisis peacefully", he told Mizzima.

The KIO, with its 20,000-strong force including a regular army of 8,000 troops, warned Naypyidaw not to use military force against it.

The junta has given all of the ethnic ceasefire groups three ultimatums starting from 28th April last year to bring their armies under the control of the BGF.

Meanwhile, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) has joined the KIO in rejecting the junta's ultimatum. "Today is the last date to reply to them. But what we want is different from what they want. They rejected eight points of our nine-point proposal. We have no more to say to them [the junta generals] as they have rejected our territorial rights", a UWSA officer told Mizzima.

[Don't use force to resolve crisis, KIO warns junta](#)

Mizzima - 22 April 2010

By Salai Han Thar San

New Delhi – Kachin Independence Organisation has warned the Burmese junta against using military might to suppress ethnic armed groups under ceasefire, refusing to bring its armed wing into the regime's Border Guard Force (BGF).

The warning came from the Kachin Independence Organisation's (KIO) joint general secretary, Colonel Sin Wah. "If they use military means to suppress us on the BGF issue, it will not be good for us, them or the people," he told Mizzima.

KIO leaders had met junta brass 15 times during the past year on the thorny issue of conversion of its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), into the BGF, but the stalemate remains unresolved.

The junta first proposed last April the putting ethnic armed groups under ceasefire into the BGF, to be controlled by Burmese officers. The KIO rejected the idea but said it would accept placement of Kachin battalions in the federal army.

"It depends on the government's attitude. We do not wish to jeopardise the current peaceful situation," Colonel Sin Wah said.

In its biggest military build-up of the past 16 years, the military regime sent about 100 army trucks to Myitkyina, the headquarters of the junta's northern command. This included 26 artillery tow trucks.

The KIO has a 20,000-strong force with a regular army of 8,000 troops. Given the mounting tension they are imparting short-term emergency military training to some local residents and former servicemen.

In its third ultimatum on the BGF issue, the junta told the United Wa State Army and the Shan State Army (North) to respond by April 22.

The KIO held a debriefing session last Thursday at the Manau ground in Laiza, which was attended by Kachin people and grass-roots staff. KIO Vice-Chief of Staff Major General Guan Maw and General Secretary Dr. La Ja clarified the outfit's political stance and the contentious BGF issue.

The next day a series of bombs exploded at the Asia World office building on the Myitsone hydropower project site in Kachin State. The junta asked the KIA whether it had had a hand in the blasts, which the latter denied.

BGF battalions comprise 326 soldiers each, commanded by a total of 30 officers and other ranks from the Burmese Army. The regime will provide the salaries. The New Democratic Army – Kachin, Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front and the Kokang group have accepted the proposal and their armies have joined the BGF.

[KIO's Liaison office raided on junta orders](#)

KNG - 23 April 2010

In a sudden development, which caught the armed rebel group unawares, a liaison office of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in Burma's northern Kachin State, was raided yesterday by combined Burmese security forces, even as the group's leaders arrived in the state's capital Myitkyina to meet the ruling junta brass on the Border Guard Force issue, said KIO sources.

The KIO's Township Office in Seng Tawng in Hpakant jade mining area, west of Kachin State, was raided between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. Burma Standard Time by Burmese security forces, comprising soldiers, policemen, reserved firefighters and administrators of Seng Tawng, added KIO sources.

The raid was carried out without any information and the security forces went over the office with a tooth comb. All the staff members were checked thoroughly along with office documents, said residents of Seng Tawng.

Fuming KIO officials in Hpakant said, "This is an unacceptable act with the ceasefire on and it is a deliberate act of provocation".

Burmese troops were also reported to be heading for the station in Sang Hka village between Lawng Hkang town and Seng Ra village, where battalion No. 6 of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of KIO is based, according to KIO officers in Hpakant.

The KIO/KIA is terribly anxious about the new Sang Hka Burmese military camp, which will cut transport links between the KIA's battalion 6 and Lawng Hkang, said KIA officers in Hpakant.

Yesterday, KIO delegates met Maj-Gen Soe Win, commander of Northern Regional Command in Myitkyina on the thorny BGF issue. The KIO had been given April 22 as the deadline to respond on the BGF by the junta.

Sources close to KIO delegates said, no response was given to Maj-Gen Soe Win on the BGF but the group discussed resolving the issue by other means which were not military in nature.

Meanwhile, the KIO needs to gear up to defend itself from any onslaught by the Burmese Army, said KIO officials in Laiza headquarters east of Kachin State, near the China border.

[Saboi Jum brothers wants KIO to accept BGF](#)

KNG - 22 April 2010

In what might lead to fresh fissures in the Kachin community, prominent peace mediators Rev. Dr. Saboi Jum and his younger brother Hkun Myat are seriously suggesting that the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) accepts the Border Guard Force proposed by junta supremo Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

The Saboi Jum brothers have told the KIO, the last remaining Kachin armed group refusing to accept the BGF that "It (BGF) is the key and the door can be opened by only a key". It means the relation between the junta and the KIO will end if the latter rejects the BGF, said a KIO official in Laiza headquarters.

Saboi Jum and Hkun Myat attended the latest KIO's public meeting explaining its stance and the "lack of positive result on BGF negotiations with the junta after 15 times", in Laiza headquarters in east Kachin State on April 16. But the two brothers had to go back home in Myitkyina without getting a chance to talk to KIO leaders, said participants.

Earlier this month, three other Kachin leaders who sided with the junta were--- Dr. Tu Ja, former Vice-president No. 2 of KIO, Zahkung Ting Ying leader of New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) transformed to BGF and Col. Lasang Awng Wa leader of KIO split Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group transformed to a militia group. They also suggested that the KIO accept BGF ---or else it will have trouble in terms of existence.

Saboi Jum is the former general secretary of Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) and founder and director of Shalom Foundation (also called Nyein Foundation), one of the largest national NGOs in Burma. His brother Hkun Myat is a businessman.

The two brothers, a pastor and a businessman mediated in a big way and successfully helped sign a ceasefire agreement between the junta and the KIO on 24 February, 1994.

The 16 year-old ceasefire has not helped usher in democracy and ethnic Kachin rights, so criticism by Kachin people of the two brothers has only mounted. The criticism revolves around the duo creating personal wealth through business, given their proximity to the ruling junta. They are not for the Kachin people.

Saboi Jum was general secretary of KBC during 1993 to 2000 and Kachin Baptist followers expected him to be a saviour of the Kachin people. However he did not fulfill the Kachin people's aspirations.

In 2007, Saboi Jum was pressured to join the signature campaign in an appeal letter to junta supremo Snr-Gen Than Shwe to halt the Irrawaddy Myitsone dam project by the Kachin Nationals Consultative Assembly. But he refused to sign.

In December, last year, Saboi Jum visited Washington D.C and suggested to U.S. officials to withdraw the economic sanctions on Burma and support the junta's general elections in 2010.

KIO delegates led by Chairman Lanyaw Zawng Hra will meet the junta's Northern Regional Commander Maj-Gen Soe Win today in Myitkyina but the KIO will refrain from providing the junta-demanded answer—on whether it will accept the BGF, said KIO officials.

[Wa Hosts Allies for Security Talks](#)

Irrawaddy – 22 April 2010

By Wai Moe

As the junta's deadline for the Border Guard Force (BGF) plan passes on Thursday, the largest of Burma's armed ethnic groups, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which has upward of 20,000 troops, met this week with its allies to discuss the potential threats they face in the near future, sources close to the groups told *The Irrawaddy*.

"The ethnic groups have learned a lesson from the failure of their Kokang allies, and are preparing a united front against any threats to the development and stability of their territories," said a source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since Naypyidaw first proposed transforming the various ethnic cease-fire groups into BGFs one year ago, groups such as the UWSA, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the Kokang army (officially called the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army), the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army and the Shan State Army-North, have formed alliances with each other.

Following the Burmese army's seizure of the Kokang headquarters in Laogai, near the Chinese border, in August last year, the cease-fire groups have reportedly pledged to stand alongside one another if one group is attacked.

The Burmese army knows that with the UWSA involved, any conflict with the ethnic groups could potentially involve a lengthy and bloody campaign. A couple of days before the deadline, the UWSA sent a letter to the junta saying it rejects the BGF proposal.

According to sources, the Wa leadership reportedly said in the letter that their stance had not changed since their previous letter to Naypyidaw on April 3. It also said that the Burmese regime, or any other party, is welcome in the Wa region if they want to help create development and stability. However, anyone who "seeks to destroy" the region's peace and development would be considered an enemy, they said.

Contrary to Naypyidaw's demands, the Wa leaders insisted that any BGF unit stationed in Wa territory must be headed by Wa commanders with Burmese army officers assigned to deputy commander positions. Furthermore, the UWSA proposed that general staff officers could be assigned from the Burmese army, but that all deputy staff officers must come from the UWSA. The Wa said it would allow six lower-ranking Burmese officers in each battalion, whereas the junta demanded 27 rank and file military personnel.

The junta rejected the Wa's terms on April 9 during a meeting between Wa leaders and a government delegation led by Lt. Col. Than Htut Thein, who is a general staff officer in the Triangle Regional Military Command, according to *The Shan Herald Agency for News*, which monitors affairs in Shan State.

Saengjuen Sarawin of *The Shan Herald Agency for News* said that both the Wa and the Burmese army are preparing for conflict. He said the Burmese have reinforced troops and military facilities in northern and southern Shan State, while the UWSA has done similarly in their own territory.

Another major ethnic cease-fire group, the KIO, based in northernmost Burma, was due to hold BGF negotiations with government officials on Thursday in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. Burmese Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein and the chief of the Military Affairs Security, Lt-Gen Ye Myint, who is the chief negotiator with the cease-fire groups, are scheduled to attend the meeting.

The KIO is yet to announce its acceptance or rejection of the BGF proposal. The group proposed that Kachin troops join a "Union Defense Forces," in the "spirit of Panglong," referring to a 1947 agreement that granted the Kachin and other ethnic groups full autonomy and internal administration of frontier areas.

Kachin sources said KIO associates in Myitkyina could face retaliatory measures after the deadline passes, noting that a Kachin official was recently arrested in Myitkyina because he traveled to his family home without travel documents.

Analysts have said the BGF issue is posing a dilemma for the Burmese army as the generals' proposal has failed to bear fruit.

Meanwhile, Chinese premier Wen Jaibao postponed his trip to Burma, Brunei and Indonesia, from April 22 to 25, due to the deathly earthquake in northwestern Qinghai Province, according to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web site.

As the Chinese are traditionally and geographically close to the Wa, Beijing has repeatedly called for peaceful solutions on ethnic issues in Burma.

[Burma accepts first election parties](#)

DVB - 23 April 2010

By Francis Wade

Two political parties have been permitted to enter the next stage of registration for elections in Burma this year, while another 17 await approval.

The Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP) is headed by Aye Lwin, a former student activist turned politician, while the 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar) is chaired by his younger brother, Ye Htun.

Both are part of the so-called 'third force' – allied to neither government nor opposition – although Aye Lwin has been accused of having close ties to the junta and is known for his campaigns against sanctions on Burma.

The two parties were among the first to submit their applications when the registration process opened last month. Fourteen other new parties have also registered, while three existing parties are also waiting to hear back on whether they can compete.

The parties' applications were deemed "to be in accord with the Political Parties Registration Law and rules and thus the Commission has passed their applications on 22 April 2010," the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper said today.

"The said two groups are to submit their applications for registration as political parties in accord with the Political Parties Registration rule 7 within 30 days from the date of acceptance," it added. "The Commission is scrutinizing the applications of the remaining groups."

The registration process for the elections is complex: authorities are already scrutinising candidate backgrounds, while parties are required to go through several more stages before finally being approved to run in the polls.

No date has yet been set for the elections, the first in Burma since 1990 when the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party won a landslide victory that was ignored by the junta, although rumours suggest they could be in October.

The NLD's refusal to compete this year stems from election laws announced in March that bar party leader Aung San Suu Kyi from participating and force her expulsion if the NLD want to take part.

The laws are seen as symptomatic of the junta's refusal to let go of power, as is the absence of any legitimate opposition entering the elections. Analysts believe that the ageing head of state, Than Shwe, will secure an influential role in a post-election 'civilian' government, but perhaps take more of a back seat.

Several proxy parties, such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), are being primed to play a leading role in Burma's near future, while the NLD has been forced into the periphery of Burmese politics and will soon be legally abolished.

[Khin Maung Swe may run solo after May 6](#)

Mizzima - 23 April 2010

New Delhi – Fissures in the National League for Democracy have deepened over the re-registration issue, with party Central Executive Committee member Khin Maung Swe leaning towards going it alone after the May 6 deadline for registration, when the group will cease to exist as a political entity.

Khin Maung Swe has however let it be known he would continue to be loyal to National League for Democracy (NLD) founder Aung San Suu Kyi and the party until the deadline. He is among the few leaders likely to form a party or contest as independents, yet they are averse to being branded disloyal to the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi, analysts believe.

The main opposition party had unanimously chosen against re-registration with the Election Commission after deciding against contesting the polls. It had said its decision was based on its view that the electoral laws were "unjust and unfair". Khin Maung Swe was among the few who disagreed with the party on the issue.

"I shall do nothing until the last date for registration, which is May 6 in keeping with my loyalty to both NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he said.

May 6 is the last date for registration with the Election Commission in accordance with this year's Political Parties Registration Law. Soon after Khin Maung Swe was publicly critical of the NLD over its decision not to run, a rumour spread that he would join the race anyway. He denied the claim, citing his indecision on the matter.

"It's not true that I will contest the elections. I have not yet decided to contest as an individual. It is just speculation by some people. I have no intention to do anything for the time being for I am in a wait-and-see mode," the NLD Information Department member and Central Executive Committee (CEC) member told Mizzima.

If political parties, which won in the 1990 general elections like the NLD, do not re-register with the commission, their legal status will automatically be void.

Fellow CEC member Dr. Than Nyein, Rangoon Division Vice-Chairman, who nurses a similar opinion on re-registration, also said he would continue to be loyal to the NLD until the cut-off date.

"We are members of NLD as long as NLD exists until May 6. We have not yet taken any decision on electoral issues," he said.

But both declined to say what they would do after the May 6 deadline.

Chin Progressive Party not to waste poll advantage

Mizzima - 22 April 2010

New Delhi - An ethnic Chin political party, which is to register with the Election Commission today, feels that though it is widely known that the junta's multi-party general election this year will not be free and fair, it needs to participate for ethnic Chin people.

"Many say the forthcoming 2010 election will not be free and fair. But we, ethnic Chin groups that are very poor, must not waste this advantage. At the same time, it is also certain that the advantage will not be fully granted and the polls will not be free and fair at all. But we should not fail to seize this advantage," Pu No Than Kap, a member of the Chin Progressive Party said.

The Chin Progressive Party registers with the Election Commission in Nay Pyi Taw today.

Pu No Than Kap told Mizzima that they should take the opportunity presented by the polls to serve ethnic Chin people. "I believe the door is being opened for Chin state by the elections. So we decided to contest the polls for the betterment of ethnic Chin people and Chin state."

This is the second time CPP is trying to register though it tried on April 9, because more documents were required to be submitted.

Besides, nine townships in Chin state, the Chin Progressive Party plans to contest the elections in Kalay Township and Tamu Township.

"Though the 2008 constitution is not 'Genuinely Federal' but it is almost 'Quasi Federal.' The Chin Progressive Party will be working together with the Chin government without discriminating if we win," Pu No Than Kap said.

The Chin Progressive Party has chosen Rangoon as its headquarters. It has 29 members in the central executive committee and 39 central committee members.

As of now there are two political parties which will contest the election in Chin state. The Chin National Party has already registered with the Election Commission on 7 April. It will contest in nine districts in Chin state.

The Chin National League for Democracy Party, which won the 1990 election in three districts in Chin state, will not participate in the election this year.

Pi Za Dim Sung, Secretary of the Chin National League for Democracy said that they had decided not to contest the election because the Burmese junta is dishonest.

Junta revamps civil militia to help USDA in polls

Khonumthung News - 23 April 2010

A civil militia is being revamped by the Mindat Township Peace and Development Council since March to help the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) candidates to contest the forthcoming general elections in Burma.

"Junta authorities have ordered villagers, who had attended civil militia training earlier, to attend training again. The idea behind the fresh training is to find ways to help USDA win the election," said Mr. Salai Thanglian in Mindat town.

The training is being conducted by Mindat based LIB 274 and they are teaching not only the technique to canvass for votes but also imparting basic military training.

"The chief commander and others ranks are teaching civilians how to shoot and assemble different weapons. There are more than 50 trainees," said an eyewitness.

The authorities are providing all necessities for the trainees including food and lodging, although during the previous training the trainees had brought their own food and other necessities.

The same renewed civil militia training is to be conducted in Hakha town.

The military junta's backbone, the USDA has not yet registered for the 2010 general elections with the Election Commission, but it begun campaigning for the polls, though other political parties have not given permission to campaign by the junta yet. -

Opinion / Analysis

[NEWS ANALYSIS: Parallels between Sudan and Burma - by Simon Roughneen](#)

Irrawaddy – 23 April 2010

BANGKOK—Since Gen. Omar al-Bashir's 1989 coup, Sudan has been run as by a military dictatorship, but not quite as long as Burma, which has been under army rule since 1962.

Still, there are many parallels between the two countries: both are multi-ethnic, poly-religious populations oppressed by a violent elite. Both are prey to a vast state security apparatus funded by natural resource revenues, in turn abetted by close links with China and Russia.

Beijing shields both countries from criticism and action at the UN Security Council, and its investment helps undermine the Western sanctions in place against both regimes. Both regimes stand accused of large-scale human rights abuses and violence against their own citizens, and a Harvard Law School report published in May 2009 drew a direct parallel between violence in western Sudan's Darfur region and that in eastern Burma.

Since fighting started in Darfur in 2003, the death of an estimated 250,000 people and the displacement of around 3 million more has become an international cause celebre. Taken by candidate Barack Obama's strong line on Darfur—and perhaps by current Vice President Joe Biden's musings about possible US military action in Sudan—the US-based Darfur lobby expected “something would be done” about Darfur if and when Obama got elected. But now the US-based human rights and Darfur lobby is angry and has criticized the Obama administration's somewhat tepid reaction to the recent elections in Sudan.

That the Sudanese elections were a sham seems beyond question. The main opposition candidates did not run in the presidential election. The southern opposition—the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is part of the country's “Government of National Unity” set up as part of a 2005 north-south peace deal. However, it restricted its participation to the south, possibly in anticipation of the 2011 referendum on whether southern Sudan will secede.

Perhaps the SPLM cut a deal with the al-Bashir National Congress Party (NCP), giving Al-Bashir a free run in northern Sudan, in exchange for the NCP accepting the south's preference for secession? Urging calm despite the flawed election, SPLM official Anne Ito told reporters, “We need peace in order to get to the next stage.” However, given that a substantial if undefined proportion of Sudan's oil is in the south, it remains to be seen if Khartoum will consent to secession next year. It has the money and the firepower to resist that outcome, while SPLM has allegedly imported arms of its own via Kenya. Over the past year, tribal violence in southern Sudan has increased, with the SPLM accusing the NCP of fomenting trouble by arming groups opposed to the SPLM in the south and funding intra-ethnic factionalism. It all sounds a bit like the Burmese junta backing ethnic splinter militias.

In the north, the NCP seems to have won seats and votes in areas not known for pro-Khartoum views. In eastern Sudan, around the city of Kassala (part of the “north”), the majority of the people are ethnic Beja and Rashaida. However, the NCP won every legislative seat bar one in the region—a result somewhat akin to the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) or similar political vehicle winning a landslide in Karen or Shan regions inside Burma. Beja Congress leader Abdullah Moussa alleged that NCP representatives emptied ballot boxes and pushed his own party observers out of the polling stations during voting and the counting of votes. He said that his party managed to win one seat on a legislative council because the Congress managed to keep an armed guard at the polling station throughout the course of the vote.

The reactions of the various observers and foreign governments to what has just transpired in Africa's largest country might be a foretaste for later in 2010, when Burma holds what exiled dissidents are calling “a military election.”

The EU observer mission issued a contradictory statement after the elections, which said that although the polls showed “deficiencies,” they “pave the way for democratic progress” in the future. How this way might be paved is not clear, not least in the EU's own statement, which elsewhere notes not only “intimidation and threats,” but says “competition was reduced as opposition candidates, considering they could not participate on an equal footing, withdrew from the race in the North.” The statement also referred to “deficiencies in voters lists and weak organisation [which] hindered the voters participation.”

Rather than paving the way for “democratic progress,” it sounds more like these elections could serve as a trial balloon for similar flawed, rigged polls in the future. The EU mission noted and was impressed by “the commitment shown by the Sudanese (not clear whether this refers to the people or government) to a process of democratic transformation in these complex conditions.” But can commitment by people achieve democratic progress in the future, when the odds are arrayed so heavily against them by a well-armed, well-funded state that wants to rig elections to maintain a grip on power behind a veil of democratic legitimacy?

Note also the contrived caveat of “complex conditions,” which is meant as a qualification of what can be expected of elections in Sudan. However, conditions are “complex” in almost every country and political context in the world, so why bother peppering an official EU observer statement with an unnecessary non-sequitur? The real reason is that such qualifications can justify “engagement” with oppressive and corrupt regimes, now based on the “principle” that a “democratic” event took place, regardless of what this means for the realities of power inside the country. The thinking seems to be along the lines: “Yes, the country is ruled by a man wanted for war crimes, yes, they ran rigged showcase elections, yes, we are running out of options and leverage over the regime...but its....” complex..and we have to allow for that.”

These semantic high-wire acts only amplify Al-Bashir's real interest in staging the election—to offset International Criminal Court indictments and an arrest warrant against him. The elections were originally to be held in 2009, based on a 2005 peace agreement which ended a long-running and brutal war between the north and south. However, the government stalled on publishing electoral laws, and the process was held up over oil-related boundary disputes between north and south, and the difficulties of holding a nationwide census in a country the size of western Europe. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Al-Bashir became more interested in the elections after the ICC first published its charges against him in mid-2008.

Now Al-Bashir has a “democratic mandate,” and the tepid international reaction to his win makes the already far-fetched likelihood that he will stand trial in The Hague even less likely. It might be no more than typical al-Bashir posturing, but he boasted in southern Blue Nile state recently that the US now backs him explicitly.

Burma's military elections are likely to serve a similar purpose: help the regime legitimize continued military rule and serve as a buffer against any attempt to establish a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity, as recommended by UN human rights envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana and backed by Australia, the Czech Republic and the UK. The US is “studying closely” Quintana's recommendations, but has not backed them explicitly.

Getting France and Germany onboard is needed to achieve a common EU position, but whether other European countries have the will to pursue this remains to be seen. In a recent statement to *The Irrawaddy*, Ireland said that it “welcomed the report and the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur,” but added, “We are working with our EU partners to see how these can best be advanced through the Human Rights Council and other UN agencies.”

Since the Sudan election, some whitewash statements have been issued from regional observation teams. Preliminary statements from the African Union, the Arab League and the east African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—a regional bloc of nations instrumental in negotiating Sudan's north-south peace deal—did not report widespread fraud, although they acknowledged irregularities and logistical problems in conducting the vote.

Sudan is a member-state of all three organizations. At the recent Asean summit in Vietnam, leaders apparently “underscored the importance of national reconciliation in [Burma] and the holding of the general election in a free, fair and inclusive manner,” according to the bloc's final statement.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said the elections should be “free and democratic with the participation of all parties.” The Vietnamese PM had visited Burma mere days before the summit, signing a number of commercial and investment deals. Beyond that, the Asean statement made no mention of how the bloc could work to push for a free and inclusive election in Burma, beyond the blandness of a summit communique.

The Burma-ICC issue aside, some Europeans are being seduced by what junta apologists and naive optimists portray as Burma’s “transition.” EU envoy to Burma/Myanmar Piero Fossini penned a recent article in which he noted that the electoral framework “makes a mockery of internationally recognized standards of democracy,” and puts this in the context of a fragile economy, widespread human and civil rights violations and the continued detention of more than 2,000 political prisoners.

Despite this indictment, Fossini remained optimistic, along the lines that the elections can serve to open some democratic space in Burma. He said, “The upcoming election can be viewed not as a point of arrival, but as a possible ‘springboard’ for change—along the example of Indonesia—as the first step in a process for gradually handing over power back to a civilian government, to continue the democratic transition.” This reads like an implicit vindication of the junta’s “Seven-Step Roadmap” to democracy, which includes the widely-criticised 2008 Constitution, as well as the recently published electoral laws – the framework for Burma’s “democratic transition.” Indonesians might also quibble, given that the country made the jump from Suharto’s dictatorship to being southeast Asia’s best-functioning democracy, in the space of a few years.

The parallels with the EU Observer statement on Sudan are clear and both seem to be grounded in wishful thinking, spun as a form of “realism,” based on “painful choices” about “complex realities.” Fossini’s article noted the “painful reflection” taken by the US and EU before both decided upon “re-engagement” with the Burmese junta.

Similarly, “painful choices” was a phrase often used by a variety of Western diplomats, implicitly urging the National League for Democracy (NLD) to take part in the 2010 election.

The NLD has made its choice in the face of a “transition” that deprived it of its leader and hundreds of leading figures, who languish in jail. It now faces disbandment, while Burma will go ahead with elections that will do little to undermine the junta’s grip on power. As with Sudan, this is the (not very) “complex reality” behind the country’s (non-existent) “democratic transition.”

Simon Roughneen has reported from Sudan and visited Darfur twice.

22/04/2010

News

[Obama Administration Defends Burma Policy](#)

Irrawaddy - 22 April 2010

By Lalit K. Jha

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration on Wednesday defended its policy of engagement with the Burmese military junta following calls from several US senators to review the policy.

P J Crowley, the US assistant secretary of state for public affairs, said the administration would continue its new policy of simultaneous engagement and economic sanctions and hoped that dialogue with the junta would yield positive results.

“The challenge of Burma wasn’t created in one year; it’s not going to be solved in one year,” Crowley said.

“We have shifted to a policy of engagement following a comprehensive review of our Burma policy. We did it because, quite honestly, sanctions alone have not yielded results either. We have begun high-level dialogue with the government of Burma on a wide range of issues of interest and concern, and we will continue this conversation,” he said.

During the annual session of the UN General Assembly in September 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the new policy for Burma that included simultaneous engagement and sanctions.

Since that time, the Obama administration has had two rounds of talks with the junta, but without apparent success as evidenced by the military regime's continued pursuit of its heavily criticized election process.

"As we said, we've been disappointed with some steps that Burma has taken recently, particularly with respect to its election laws," Crowley said. "Burma has an ongoing challenge. It has to solve much of its challenge internally, with broader dialogue with various elements of Burmese society. It has to open up its political process to more participants."

"We will continue to send that strong message to Burma. I think that we would hope that over time it will yield results. But we are not surprised that this has been a difficult process," he said.

In response to a question, Crowley said, "We have already indicated our concerns and that under these circumstances we would not recognize the [election] result."

Reacting to reports that North Korea exported weapons to Burma last week, Crowley said it is the responsibility of the Burmese government to abide by the UN Security Council resolutions regarding North Korea.

"All states, including Burma, have a special responsibility to be vigilant and transparent in their dealings with North Korea. We have long-standing concerns about military links between North Korea and Burma, and we expect all UN member states, including Burma, to carry out their obligations under UN Security Council resolutions 1718 and 1874," Crowley said.

[US rep says China 'stealing Burma'](#)

DVB - 22 April 2010

By Francis Wade

Burma is becoming a "subservient province of Beijing" and risks being lost to its bigger neighbour "for generations to come", a US congressman has said.

Speaking in fiery tones before the House of Representatives on Tuesday, California representative Dana Rohrabacher warned that the pariah Southeast Asian state was the victim of a "Chinese power grab".

"China is literally stealing Burma from its own people, and it is accomplishing this monumental crime with the assistance of Burmese government officials whose lust for power is greater than any loyalty to their own national homeland," he said.

He added that "the patriots and freedom-loving people of Burma will either join against tyranny and foreign domination, or their country will be lost for generations to come."

Chinese presence is indeed growing in Burma as Beijing looks to tap the country's vast natural gas reserves, as well as secure an overland pipeline route to Yunnan province for Middle Eastern oil being offloaded in the Bay of Bengal.

Bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$US264 million in February this year alone, up 92 percent year on year, according to the Xinhua news agency. Of that, \$US215 million was Chinese exports to Burma.

Last month however a leading US senator acknowledged that it was strict Western sanctions promoted by Washington that had pushed Burma closer to China.

The US has long been concerned with growing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia, a region that US presence in has waned in recent decades as efforts have been concentrated on the Middle East and Latin America. Moreover, the US has vehemently opposed the current military government in Burma, which receives its strongest backing from Beijing.

Washington has however had a tempestuous relationship with Burma: in the 1950s, president Eisenhower installed and armed Chinese nationalists in Burma to carry out cross-border operations into Mao-ruled China, despite the protests of the U Nu administration in Burma, its first civilian government after British rule ended.

Several analysts, including the leading Southeast Asia scholar George Kahin, have said that the huge surplus of arms in Burma that resulted from this initiative, coupled with a need to bolster the army in lieu of possible retaliation from China, was a key factor in fomenting military rule in Burma.

But the adamantly nationalist ruling generals in Burma are also known to be concerned about over-dependence on China, and thus China's leverage in the country. China meanwhile has expressed concern that instability in Burma, particularly along the China-Burma border, could jeopardise business interests there.

"Burma is not completely dependent on China but dependent enough; they've lost their economic independence," said regional expert Bertil Lintner. "They're in the clutches of China; there's nothing they can do about them."

Chinese imports, particularly in textiles and heavy machinery, dominate Burma's domestic market, but beyond beyond the economic ties there is also a strategic element to the close cooperation between the two countries.

"It's more than a relationship of convenience – it's a military relationship," Lintner said. "There are Burmese officers who have undergone military training in Kunming [in southern China]."

[Canadian uni 'spied' on Burmese students](#)

DVB - 21 April 2010

By Joseph Allchin

Ka Hsaw Wa is a Karen refugee in Canada, a nation with some of the most stringent sanctions on Burma's ruling generals. It has now been revealed that he and others were spied on by a university for having a meeting about his homeland.

Ka Hsaw Wa, one of the founding members of the US-based EarthRights International (ERI), was due to speak at the University of Ottawa, along with members of the Canadian Friends of Burma (CFOB), about the French oil giant Total and its business activities in Burma, which include the Yadana pipeline project.

Rights groups have said that human rights violations have surrounded the project, accusations which landed Total in court, although the case was eventually settled out-of-court. The 5 December 2007 meeting was called 'Burma Blood Profits: was Ottawa U's Desmarais building paid for with cash tainted by the blood of innocent Burmese citizens?'

However the university had other ideas. In an email dated 30 November 2007 circulated to colleagues by Victor Simon, University of Ottawa vice president for resources, he cautioned that "we should prohibit the use of our facilities for this event, on the grounds that the program material includes allegations and accusations that may be libellous . . . I know that this kind of action thinking flies in the face of many principles we hold dear in the University world, but I think we have others interests at stake here."

The university was concerned because the building Ka Hsaw Wa was going to talk in, the new \$15 million Desmarais building named after the family of the same name, was bankrolled by Paul G. Desmarais, who sat on the board of Total.

The information, disclosed to CFOB through the freedom of information request, "implicates a corporate interest at the university", according to former Ottawa University student and now-prominent human rights lawyer, Yava Hameed.

However the release of this information was delayed for more than ten months as the university sought to prevent disclosure of their relationship and bias towards a benefactor.

“They tried everything they could to delay and prevent us from getting the documents. They said we couldn’t see the documents because of an attorney client privilege, but we eventually got that disclosed,” says Kevin McCleod, on the board of directors of CFOB.

Despite Simon’s feeling that the action “flies in the face of many principles”, the university president, Giles Patry, as a result of the ‘other interests’ that Simon speaks of, suggests in the emails that “We should monitor to see if they [Ka Hsaw Wa et al] are exposing themselves with libellous comments.”

Indeed after the event, CFOB were suspicious of a number of members of the audience who, according to McCleod, “were acting rather strange...like writing down everything that was said – they really weirded people out”.

This prompted CFOB to request the access to information and, through multiple appeals and a previous case in which a professor was sacked based on evidence from a student spy from the university’s newspaper, they realised that the activities of discussing the impacts of large corporations on Burma was, as Yavar Hamid puts it, a “sore spot for the university administration”.

On receiving, drip by drip, the transcripts of the emails that senior university staff sent between each other, some with redacted areas, CFOB also came to learn that as requested, the social networking site Facebook had been used to find out which students were attending the meeting. One message, sent on 30 November 2007 by Steve Bernique, assistant director of operations at the university, said “I love this programme [Facebook]! Now we know who is going to attend.”

A screen shot of the list was distributed amongst the higher echelons of the university as they discussed possible ways of blocking the event, including making use of university facilities out of the financial reach of groups such as ERI and CFOB.

“I think it’s quite incomprehensible; I don’t understand the actions of any academic institution spying on students and the community expressing their academic right and freedom; it’s preposterous,” says Hameed. “It wasn’t clear to me who the spies were but all the same it was quite distressing that students could be induced or paid to spy on fellow students and human rights activities.”

One member of the audience had deeper reasons for feeling distressed: octogenarian Harvey Su is the oldest Karen refugee in Canada. He was “appalled” by the surveillance, a phenomenon he thought he had fled.

“Who are these University of Ottawa presidents, vice presidents and security staff working for exactly? The people of Ontario? Or are they working for the Desmarais family, the oil companies and the Burmese military regime? This I really want to know.”

He has since forbidden his grandchildren from attending the University of Ottawa and called for the resignation of the chancellor of ‘Canada’s university’, as their slogan goes.

The University of Ottawa was unavailable for comment.

[New South Wales Will Not Acknowledge Burma's Election](#)

Irrawaddy – 22 April 2010

By Ko Htwe

The upper house of Parliament in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) passed a unanimous resolution on Tuesday not to acknowledge Burma’s election unless Burma’s ruling junta revises the 2008 Constitution and releases all political prisoners, including main opposition leader Aung San Su Kyi.

The resolution was submitted to the NSW upper house on Sunday by Dr. John Kaye, a senator from the Australian Greens party and the president of the Australian Coalition for Democracy in Burma.

“The regime will get the message that they cannot get recognition from the international community. We see this matter is important,” Dr. Myint Cho, the Burma Campaign Australia (BCA) spokesman, told *the Irrawaddy* on Wednesday.

“The BCA will cooperate closely with Sen. Kaye to put Australian government pressure on Burma,” Dr. Cho said.

Australia has long enforced an embargo on the delivery of arms to Burma and added financial sanctions in 2007.

In New Zealand, the representative of the National Council of the Union of Burma, Naing Ko Ko, met on Tuesday with six current members of the New Zealand Parliament and Maryan Street, a former member who in 2007 founded the New Zealand Burma Cross Party Support Group.

“They discussed what is possible,” Naing Ko Ko told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday. “I urge the New Zealand Parliament and government to join and sign onto the crime against community campaign which was conducted by England and Australia in the United Nations. I also urge New Zealand to put more pressure on Burma in the United Nations Security Council meeting.”

[Don't use force to resolve crisis, KIO warns junta](#)

Mizzima - 22 April 2010

By Salai Han Thar San

New Delhi – Kachin Independence Organisation has warned the Burmese junta against using military might to suppress ethnic armed groups under ceasefire, refusing to bring its armed wing into the regime's Border Guard Force (BGF).

The warning came from the Kachin Independence Organisation's (KIO) joint general secretary, Colonel Sin Wah. “If they use military means to suppress us on the BGF issue, it will not be good for us, them or the people,” he told *Mizzima*.

KIO leaders had met junta brass 15 times during the past year on the thorny issue of conversion of its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), into the BGF, but the stalemate remains unresolved.

The junta first proposed last April the putting ethnic armed groups under ceasefire into the BGF, to be controlled by Burmese officers. The KIO rejected the idea but said it would accept placement of Kachin battalions in the federal army.

“It depends on the government's attitude. We do not wish to jeopardise the current peaceful situation,” Colonel Sin Wah said.

In its biggest military build-up of the past 16 years, the military regime sent about 100 army trucks to Myitkyina, the headquarters of the junta's northern command. This included 26 artillery tow trucks.

The KIO has a 20,000-strong force with a regular army of 8,000 troops. Given the mounting tension they are imparting short-term emergency military training to some local residents and former servicemen.

In its third ultimatum on the BGF issue, the junta told the United Wa State Army and the Shan State Army (North) to respond by April 22.

The KIO held a debriefing session last Thursday at the Manau ground in Laiza, which was attended by Kachin people and grass-roots staff. KIO Vice-Chief of Staff Major General Guan Maw and General Secretary Dr. La Ja clarified the outfit's political stance and the contentious BGF issue.

The next day a series of bombs exploded at the Asia World office building on the Myitsone hydropower project site in Kachin State. The junta asked the KIA whether it had had a hand in the blasts, which the latter denied.

BGF battalions comprise 326 soldiers each, commanded by a total of 30 officers and other ranks from the Burmese Army. The regime will provide the salaries. The New Democratic Army – Kachin, Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front and the Kokang group have accepted the proposal and their armies have joined the BGF.

Burmese battalions gather on NMSP

IMNA – 21 April 2010

Two Burmese battalions have moved to set up bases in Tenasserim Division, in close proximity to the border of the New Mon State Party's territory in (NMSP) Tavoy District.

This section of Tavoy District makes up the southernmost region of the territory accorded to the NMSP in its 1995 ceasefire agreement with the currently Burmese military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Sources in the area identified the 2 battalions as Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 282 and other battalion. The groups moved into the region on Saturday and Monday, respectively, and have set up their artillery forces near the Tavoy District village of Snee Dein.

A witness explained, "at least 25 soldiers arrived at Snee Dein village on Saturday, and on Monday more arrived."

This witness also reported that villagers from Snee Dein and the surrounding area in Tavoy District, have begun packing up their belongings. Threats of a potential end to 1995 ceasefire treaty, following the release of the NMSP's final decision regarding its acceptance or refusal of the SPDC's Border Guard Force (BGF) or people's militia offer, has many preparing to flee the region.

On April 19th, IMNA published news of an April 7th meeting between NMSP leaders and Southeast Command Lieutenant General Ye Myint, where the latter reportedly threatened that a refusal of the SPDC's people's militia or BGF offer would result in the return of a "pre-ceasefire" relationship between the two groups. The General reportedly gave the party a deadline of April 22nd to make its decision.

In an interview with IMNA published yesterday, NMSP spokesman Nai Chay Mon explained that party members are waiting for direction from their leaders, who are currently holding an emergency meeting in southern Mon State to discuss their response to Gen. Ye Myint's ultimatum.

LIB No 282 is based in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division under the management of the Coastal Regional Command, in Tenasserim Division. LIB 675 is, according to the Human Right's Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), has been documented as a "baseless" battalion.

Burma's election campaigning begins in earnest

Mizzima - 21 April 2010

By Larry Jagan

Bangkok – Preparations for Burma's first elections in 20 years are about to get underway in earnest now that Buddhist New Year festivities are over. At least 20 parties who plan to contest the forthcoming polls have already registered, even though the polling date remains a secret. More are expected to file with the Election Commission in the next few weeks.

The junta is keen to make the electoral process internationally credible, after the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) decided to boycott the polls because they fear they will neither be free nor fair. So top military man and junta leader, Senior General Than Shwe, plans a mass amnesty of political prisoners, including some high-profile activists, according to a senior military source.

But the bomb blasts during the Thingyan (New Year) celebrations, which left 10 dead and 170 injured may have put a spanner in the works – at least temporarily. Plans to announce the formation of a military caretaker government and the release of hundreds of activists may now be on hold.

"Security issues are a constant pre-occupation of the top generals," Burmese political scientist Win Min, a visiting lecturer at Chiang Mai University, said. "So nothing is likely to be done until they are sure that this was an isolated incident – and not the start of a concerted campaign."

General Than Shwe is increasingly paranoid, and since the monks' uprising in 2007 never sleeps in the same residence two nights running, according to sources close to his family. In 2002, during the alleged plot to overthrow the government by the family of Ne Win, the top three generals at the time – Than Shwe, Maung Aye and Khin Nyunt – all slept for more than a week in the War Office because they feared

they were the target of a foreign assassin, a mercenary hired by Ne Win's son-in-law, a Burmese intelligence officer told Mizzima at the time.

"While the bomb blasts reveal simmering tensions, they are extremely unlikely to alter the regime's resolve to push ahead with the elections," Richard Horsey, Burma analyst, former International Labour Organisation representative in Rangoon and author of several recent reports on the forthcoming elections, told Mizzima.

But many diplomats and analysts also believe that until those behind the bombs are revealed it is difficult to determine what impact if any the blasts will have on the elections.

Dr. Maung Zarni, a Burmese academic and senior visiting fellow at Chulalongkorn University Institute of Security and International Studies, said: "Than Shwe himself maybe looking for an excuse to put it off – so that the election postponement could allow him the freedom to go after the KIO and the UWSA if they continue to resist the government's demand to disarm and join the newly formed Border Guard Force," he said, referring to the Kachin Independence Organisation and the United Wa State Army.

"The bomb a few days later in Kachin State would seem to give this view greater credibility," he told Mizzima.

Nevertheless preparations for the polls are underway again, with new political parties seeking registration. Most of them are new organisations, with only three of the 10 registered parties that fought elections in 1990, which the NLD won convincingly, prepared to stand candidates again this time round.

But many in Burma's commercial centre Rangoon remain sceptical and unmoved by the whole process. "Why should we care, nothing will change," an elderly taxi driver said.

"Burma is unique," 28-year-old teacher Maung Maung Thein said. "We'll have a president, but a president with no power," he laughed.

The bomb blasts may have interrupted the junta's schedule though. There maybe a delay in naming the interim administration, which had been slated to be in place early next month to run the country until the polls and then make sure there is a smooth hand-over to the newly elected civilian government.

There will only be 17 ministers in the new "caretaker military government", according to Burmese military sources. Some existing ministers may stay in place, but most of them will retire or enter politics. The current prime minister, Lieutenant General Thein Sein, who is expected to retire, recently told several close confidants that he had to move out of his government residence in the capital Naypyidaw immediately after Thingyan. Other ministers, including the powerful industries minister, Aung Thaung have already moved into palatial homes around the capital, or are in the process of having them built.

At least a dozen ministers, including Information Minister Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, Interior Minister Major General Maung Oo and Agriculture and Irrigation Minister Major General Htay Oo, will resign to take up political careers. The fifth-top general and head of military intelligence, Lieutenant General Myint Swe, is believed to be destined to become the new prime minister in the interim administration, though Than Shwe may reconsider this as he was put in charge of the investigations into the previous explosions in May 2005, which killed more than 20 people and more than 200 others injured, and never found the culprits.

"Many major generals and colonels have been brought to the capital for training in the past month," Win Min told Mizzima. "Some of these will take over the ministries in the interim cabinet and others will become politicians."

Twenty-five per cent of the seats in the new bicameral parliament are reserved for serving soldiers, so some 200 officers will become national parliamentarians. There are also 14 regional parliaments, all with military men turned politicians. More than 1,000 soldiers are enrolled in a school being run by military chief General Thura Shwe Man. "They are being taught about parliamentary procedures and civilian matters in readiness for their new role as politicians," Win Min said.

Most of these people are unhappy at being seconded from the army, a western researcher who has interviewed several retired officers told Mizzima, declining to be identified in case the authorities

stopped his work. After five years – the duration of the parliamentary term – these soldiers would expect to return to the ranks, but fear that they will have missed out on several promotions as a result.

In the national parliament, these military representatives will be colonels or above – all of them graduates of prestigious officers' schools. "I did not do my officer training to enter politics," said one colonel confidentially. "I studied so I could become a general some day."

The parties who have already submitted the necessary registration papers to the newly appointed Election Commission are waiting for their approval before openly preparing for the elections or campaigning. But they are already working behind the scenes to get ready for the elections.

One of the United Democratic Party leaders, U Thu Wai, said his party already has selected more than 100 people to contest the constituencies once the candidate registration is open. The National Union Party (NUP), which ran in the previous elections and won only 10 seats, but secured more than 20% of the vote, has also already chosen their candidates for this election. The NUP leaders told UN special human rights envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana on his visit in February that they had selected all their candidates and were already planning election strategy.

The main pro-junta party is yet to be formed, though it is well known that the mass pro-government community organisation, the Union Solidarity and Development Organisation (USDA), created by junta chief Than Shwe more than 15 years ago will be the military's main vehicle in the elections. Its leader, the agriculture minister who is a close confidant of the senior general, has repeatedly told visiting diplomats that he would soon be a politician. In fact he is being tipped by many to become the next prime minister in the post-poll "civilianized" government.

The USDA's logo is a lion, and many observers believe that the future potential party is trying to use this emblem as its political symbol, and avoid trying to invent a name for as long a possible.

Of course the party that convincingly won the 1990 elections but was never allowed to form a government – the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by the charismatic pro-democracy icon and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi – has refused to register because it would mean ditching their founder and leader.

Under the parties registration law anyone who is serving a prison sentence cannot be a member of a political party, which would mean expelling Ms Suu Kyi, who is serving a prison sentence under house arrest. She has spent more than 14 of the past 21 years in detention. She was also prevented from contesting the 1990 elections because she was under house arrest.

For many activists and the international community this effectively makes sure the election process is neither credible nor inclusive. This is in fact what Than Shwe wanted all along, according to observers.

"The main aim of the junta's election laws is clearly to emasculate the NLD and prevent their leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from taking any part in the forthcoming electoral process," British Burma expert and biographer of the pro-democracy icon, Justin Wintle, said.

This is a view most western countries endorse. "We certainly are very concerned about the election laws and the situation facing the NLD," Scot Marciel, the US ambassador for Asean told Mizzima recently. "The laws put the opposition in a very difficult position."

Undaunted, Than Shwe hopes to maintain the advantage by releasing hundreds of political prisoners next month. A list of those to be granted an amnesty has been drawn, according to sources in Naypyidaw, and has already been submitted to the senior general to vet and approve.

It includes many political prisoners from different groups. While some NLD activists are amongst them, the vast majority are ethnic rebels, members of the 88 Generation group and former military intelligence officers from the time of the ousted prime minister and spy boss, Khin Nyunt.

There will also a collection of social activists – many of them arrested and sentenced for their work during the aftermath of the devastating cyclone, Nargis. The renowned comedian Zarganar is almost certain to be among them. Some so-called internet criminals and journalists may also be included. What is also certain is that there will also be leading ethnic leaders and activists freed, but not Shan leader Khun Htun Oo.

Some Rohingya are also on the list, said a military source, as Than Shwe wants to boost the pro-junta's electoral chances in places such as Northern Rakhine State. These are most likely to include the unfortunate men and women who have been locked up for marrying without permission.

Than Shwe hopes that some of these prisoners, especially the 88 Generation student leaders and Zarganar, will decide to take part in the elections. But in the light of the NLD's recent decision, it is by no means certain that they will choose this option. Than Shwe though, at the very least, hopes to show he is trying to make the process inclusive and credible and that it is the NLD that is hell-bent on disrupting the polls.

But as a Burmese writer and political analyst told Mizzima recently, the Burmese people are not that gullible. "The people will punish the government," he said on condition of anonymity, as his comments would certainly land him in jail. "The payback will certainly come at the elections."

[NLD Youth rolls out human rights aims](#)

Mizzima - 22 April 2010

By Khai Suu

New Delhi – Human rights issues will be the focus of National League for Democracy (Youth) activities once the party ceases to exist as a legal entity, a party spokesman said yesterday.

Electoral law provisions published last month by the military regime were causing the party to expire, – Rangoon Division Hlaing Tharyar Township National League for Democracy (NLD) Youth information department joint chief Khai Soe said.

"After the NLD took the decision not to stand for election, our party programmes and activities will be more clearly directed on human rights issues and activities ... Because we think, under the 2008 constitution, the human rights situation will worsen before and after the election", Khai Soe told Mizzima.

"I have experience in this issue as I am the former political prisoner. I fully comprehend the dangers that lie ahead ... But we cannot be afraid ..." he said. "We must face this situation and do what we should. We will work on these activities for the development of rights in Burma and to put our work back on a democratic track."

The policy will be put to work within the legal framework by starting in Pegu, Irrawaddy and Magwe divisions, he said. Among the activities, the group will expose oppression by local authorities, land-grabbing, extrajudicial killings, forced recruitment of child soldiers and forced voting in the forthcoming elections.

"We will support the families of political prisoners by visiting their homes for counselling. And we will encourage them and discuss with them their right to choose whether or not to vote and that no force should be exerted. We will tell them to inform us when they experience these kinds of oppression and we will convey these violations to the people who deserved to be informed", Khai Soe said.

He also said that he will start this activity alone but that he has many supporters. He has to fill the vacuum left by rights activist Suu Suu New, who is serving a prison sentence for her work.

Khai Soe was sentenced to a seven-year jail term in 1998 by the Insein Special Tribunal after being charged under sections 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act and 17(1) of the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act.

(Section 5(j): to affect the morality or conduct of the public or a group of people in a way that would undermine the security of the Union or the restoration of law and order; Section 17(1): Whoever is member of an unlawful association, or takes part in meetings of any such association, or contributes or receives or solicits any contribution for the purpose of any such association, or in any way assists the operations of any such association, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term [which shall not be less two years and more than three years and shall also be liable to fine].)

After his release from prison, he has engaged in social work and became an NLD member in 2007. "I gave vocational training to children in abject poverty and school dropouts by finding donors. And also I

provided training in hairdressing to young prostitutes who had been pushed into the flesh trade because of economic hardship and poverty. I organised them to get back on track," he said.

Regime-backed Parties Campaign for Muslim Votes

Irrawaddy – 22 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

The regime-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and the National Unity Party (NUP) are seeking Rohingya Muslim support by offering incentives in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships in northwestern Arakan State.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, Arakan Project coordinator Chris Lewa said, "The Township Peace Development Chairman (TPDC) in Maungdaw Township for the first time attended a meeting of the leaders of the Rohingya madrassah (Koran-based schools) on Monday in Alel Than Kyaw in northern Arakan State to raise funds for the schools.

"The chairman offered a donation 400,000 kyat (US \$400) to the madrassah committee and 450 turbans for the students," Lewa said. "This is first time I've ever heard of TPDC making a donation to the mosque in Arakan State."

The USDA and NUP began campaigning in Arakan State about two months ago.

Tun Tun, an Arakanese who lives on the border of Bangladesh, said the NUP has targeted north and south Buthidaung Township. In that area, about NUP 40 members from Buthidaung have sought support village to village, offering low-income residents 2,000 kyat (\$2), rice and clothing. They are also telling residents they will provide them with temporary identity cards (ID) that would allow them to vote and to travel free in Arakan State.

He said that border authority officials are working with the campaign to provide the ID cards.

Sources in the area also said that Burmese authorities have brought in prominent pro-junta Muslim businessmen from Rangoon and Buthidaung to mobilize Rohingya support for the NUP, a party formed from the former Burma Socialist Programme Party led by former dictator Gen Ne Win.

The Rohingya are the second largest ethnic group in Arakan State, after the Arakanese. Rohingya are in the majority in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships in the northern part of the state. They comprise nearly 30 percent of the state's population of 2.75 million people.

Tin Soe, an editor with the Bangladesh-based *Kaladan News Network*, said the NUP and USDA discussed issuing ID cards to the Rohingya Muslim after a visit by Prime Minister Thein Sein and Deputy Prime Minister for Home Affairs Brigadier Gen Phone Swe to Arakan State in March.

"I believe that they are using the people during the election," he said. "I haven't seen any ID cards issued to the people. They're just talking about it." He said that USDA members have also talked about repairing the local mosque or building a new one.

According to the new electoral law, foreign registration ID card holders, people who being considered for citizenship and people holding a temporary identification card may vote if they are 18 or older.

In 2008, the Rohingya were allowed to vote in the constitutional referendum if they held temporary ID cards.

Normally, Rohingya are not recognized as citizens of Burma even though many were born in the country and have lived in northwestern Arakan State all their lives. In the past, many bribed authorities in Arakan State to get ID cards.

The Rohingya, a stateless minority people, face harsh treatment by Burmese authorities. They are prohibited from traveling outside Arakan State and are further marginalized by other discriminatory laws.

Meanwhile, a new Arakan political party, the Union of Myanmar National Force Arakan State Party, has been formed to compete in the election in Arakan State.

In the 1990 election, among 26 constituencies in Arakan State, 11 constituencies went to the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD). The ALD has said it will not take part in the election this year because it believes the 2008 Constitution is undemocratic.

Junta Collects Voter Lists

Irrawaddy – 21 April 2010

By Kyaw Thein Kha

The Burmese junta is canvassing Rangoon and Irrawaddy Division and collecting registered lists of family members to ensure it has the name and location of potential voters prior to the election.

Sources told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday that since last month the junta authorities have scoured townships in those divisions and registered each family member.

“The authorities visit one house after another, identifying the number of family members for the family registration document. The Rangoon Division of the State Peace and Development Council has instructed the ward council to do that,” said a member of the United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) living in Ahlone township, Rangoon Division.

“Lists of family members are currently being collected in 20 Rangoon townships,” he said.

According to sources close to the authorities, the government wants to know the specific number of residents living in each township for the upcoming election, and there is pressure on the families to comply.

“We have to go to the ward council to have a family photo taken for the family registration. It’s not easy to organize all the family members to gather in one place for the registration and photo, but it could be a problem if the authorities check the family at home and see family members that were not in the photo,” said a Rangoon resident.

These concerns may not be avoidable, however, because for persons who travel or live away from the family home, it may not be possible to be photographed and included in the registration list.

The authorities are trying to track down itinerant individuals and families as well.

“The authorities urgently need to register the families that have moved to a new area. They need to know the specific number of residents living in each location for the election,” said an official from Rangoon Division general administrative department.

The government conducted a similar registration push just before the 2008 referendum on the constitution, and the way the lists were used may foreshadow the way the announced election will be conducted.

“The authorities collected family registration lists during the last week of April, 2008. We didn’t have to vote during the referendum. The authorities from the ward council just used the list of family members to vote for us,” said a resident of Labutta township, Irrawaddy Division.

Nayee Lin Let contributed to this article.

India eyes \$5.6bn Burma hydropower deal

DVB - 22 April 2010

By Joseph Allchin

India’s state-owned National Hydro Power Company Limited (NHPC) will increase its investment in Burma to the tune of an extra \$US5.6 billion as Burma aggressively expands its energy sector.

The head of the NHPC, S K Garg, told the Wall Street Journal the company was “inching towards Myanmar [Burma]. We have already sent our team to Myanmar for further survey and investigation for two projects.”

Little is known of the location of the projects, but the Wall Street Journal suggests that they could be two new 510-megawatt and 520-megawatt dams.

The NHPC already has a major presence in the country, primarily at the Tamanthi dam on the Chindwin river in Burma's northern Sagaing division. The project has a capability of providing 1200 megawatts of electricity, 80 percent of which it is believed will go straight to India.

As of 2007, according to research by the Burma Rivers Network (BRN), over 380 families had been displaced by the Tamanthi dam and none had reportedly received compensation. It is estimated that the dam will eventually displace some 30,000 people in 35 different Kuki ethnic villages.

Sai Sai from BRN said that these people have absolutely no input or "right to participate" in the decision-making process for the dam, a fact that is clearly against the first recommendation of the World Commission on Dams: "Development needs and objectives should be clearly formulated through an open and participatory process, before various project options are identified," it says.

Added to this, the Chindwin river is the only known habitat of the Burmese Roofed Turtle, a species that will be lost forever by the construction of the dam.

The Wall Street Journal further notes that within India "progress on hydroelectric power capacity addition has been slow due to environmental concerns and issues related to resettlement of people displaced because of the construction of dams".

This would suggest a strong incentive for India investing in Burma's hydropower sector, given BRN's concerns about a lack of accountability in the process.

The Tamanthi dam is being constructed by the NHPC in collaboration with Swiss company Colenco Power Engineering Ltd. According to Garg, quoted in the Indian press, the NHPC is also involved in the 642-megawatt Shwezaye dam.

BRN believes that construction of the Tamanthi dam had been suspended after it began in 2007, suggesting that renewed investment of the sort mentioned by Garg may be needed to finish it, although at present details are not available.

It is believed however that consultants had been engaged by NHPC, but their findings had not yet been put to the government in Naypyidaw.

China is without doubt the leading investor in Burma's hydropower sector, with numerous projects on rivers across the country, many of which have attracted international controversy and condemnation.

The drying of the Mekong river is partly blamed on Chinese dam construction, whilst Kachin organisations and individuals have strongly petitioned against forthcoming dam projects on the Irrawaddy river, including the Myitsone dam.

21/04/2010

News

[Mon Prepare for Jungle Warfare](#)

Irrawaddy – 20 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

Several leaders, officials and soldiers of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) held secret farewell parties over the weekend in state capital Moulmein, as they made preparations to travel to jungle bases in anticipation of an outbreak in hostilities between the Mon cease-fire group and the Burmese army, a source in Moulmein told *The Irrawaddy* on Monday.

The source said preparations to leave town follow the breakdown of negotiations between NMSP leaders and Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the chief negotiator for the Burmese military regime on the border guard force (BGF) issue.

“A friend of mind told me that he will go back to the jungle soon,” the source said. “He asked me to look after his children. I was very sad as we have been friends for a long time.”

According to some members of the NMSP in Three Pagodas Pass, on the Thai-Burmese border, representatives of the Mon party have been told by their leaders to prepare for the next round of talks on April 22. If negotiations with the junta break down and war looks inevitable, they have been advised to abandon their homes and head to jungle bases.

Officially, the NMSP has 3,500 members, though perhaps only 700 currently serve as soldiers.

Nai Hang Thar, the secretary of the NMSP, said he expects many members to head for the jungle camps if war breaks out. He said that jungle conditions will only be hard at first.

However, some observers predicted that many NMSP members in Mon State will not abandon their property and livelihoods, although they expect Mon refugees and many of those living in Thailand will join up to support the ethnic army in the event of war.

Nai Tin Aung, a former member of the NMSP executive committee, said that he doesn't believe that the Burmese government will attack the NMSP.

“If they attack the NMSP, the political process will be affected,” he said. “They are simply pressuring the Mon to act on the BGF issue.”

The junta has set a deadline of April 28 for the cease-fire groups to accept the BGF plan or be declared illegal organizations.

Ye Myint met the four executive members of the NMSP on April 7 at the Regional Southeast Command site in Moulmein to discuss the BGF proposal.

Nai Chay Mon, a spokesperson for the NMSP, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday that, during the meeting, Ye Myint offered the Mon leaders an option to transform their troops into paramilitary units if they were opposed to the BGF plan.

“The party leaders will hold a meeting on Wednesday to discuss Lt-Gen Ye Myint's proposal,” said Nai Chay Mon.

The NMSP is one of several ethnic cease-fire groups that the Burmese regime is pressuring to join its BGF plan under Burmese army command.

Tension has increased between the NMSP and the Burmese military since the Mon rejected the regime's order to transform its army into a BGF last year.

In March, the NMSP moved some of its administration and a stockpile of weapons to a new undisclosed base, a source close to the group said.

Party leaders have said that they will wage guerrilla warfare against the Burmese army if conflict breaks out.

The NMSP signed a cease-fire agreement with the regime in 1995. After 14 years of cease-fire, government forces have about 30 battalions in Mon State. Before the cease-fire, there were about 10 battalions.

Related Article: [A Matter of Autonomy and Arms](#)

[Wa Still Say 'No' to Border Guard Force](#)

Irrawaddy – 20 April 2010

By Wai Moe

The United Wa State Army (UWSA), the largest armed ethnic group in Burma with more than 20,000 troops, is holding firm and refusing to join the Burmese military junta's Border Guard Force (BGF).

The junta's plan is to put all armed cease-fire groups under the Tatamdaw (Burma's armed forces) before Thursday, the latest junta deadline.

According to sources, the Wa leadership recently met to discuss the BGF and the future of the UWSA. They decided once again to reject the BGF plan.

This decision followed previous, unsuccessful attempts by the Wa leadership to negotiate with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

“The Wa chairman Bao Youxiang sent two letters to the SPDC, compromising over the BGF. However, the SPDC rejected both letters—and the Wa leaders decided not to give up any more ground,” said Saengjuen Sarawin, an editor of *Shan Herald Agency for News* monitoring ethnic affairs.

Sarawin said some Wa leaders believed that, although they could not agree to the entire BGF plan, they had to give an alternative position rather than simply saying “no.”

“This kind of thinking came not only from the Wa but also from those beyond the border,” he added, referring China's involvement in negotiations.

But the junta wants ethnic groups to accept the BGF plan without changes by April 22, and will not hold further talks with the Wa regarding the plan.

With the BGF acceptance deadline now only two days away, it is a tense time for all the ethnic cease-fire groups who have refused to join the BGF since it was first proposed in April 2009, as well as for the junta.

Although these ethnic groups have vowed to resolve the issue peacefully and politically, they are preparing for the worst.

Sources said that both the Wa and its ally, the National Democratic Alliance Army based in Mongla, eastern Shan State, began before the beginning of April to mobilize their administration staff for potential conflict.

Now the ethnic groups have put troops on alert to defend their territory if the SPDC decides to take military action.

At the same time, the junta appears to be preparing for an offensive if the armed cease-fire groups do not meet the Thursday deadline.

According to local people in Thazi, a town en route to southern Shan State, dozens of military vehicles carrying infantry troops were driving into the Shan mountains, possible to confront the Wa troops based in southern Shan State, near the Thai-Burmese border.

A rumor circulating among government troops is that an offensive against ethnic armed forces may take place on April 28, according to military sources in Rangoon.

The junta has also tightened trade routes to ethnic cease-fire areas in Shan State and Kachin State, and government agencies have launched psychological warfare attempts among business and local communities along the Burma-China border.

“The junta agents in Muse are saying that their troops would launch a five-day long military offensive against the Wa in late April if they failed to join the BGF,” said Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese military observer based on the Burma-China border.

“However, it seems just a threat to the Wa and other ethnic groups. Making a new war is not so easy for the junta. It could backfire both on itself and its relationship with China.”

April 17 marked the 21st anniversary of the formation of the UWSA.

The UWSA was formed after the Wa split from the Communist Party of Burma, leading to the junta's cease-fire agreements with former communist fighters, including the UWSA.

For the past 20 years, the Wa has held a big celebration in Panghsang, its headquarters near the Burma-China border.

At the 20th anniversary celebration on April 17, 2009, Bao Youxiang, a UWSA commander and the chairman of its political wing, the United Wa State Party, vowed before thousands of supporters to build a more solid and united Wa State.

But with the Wa and its allies living under the looming BGF deadline and potential armed conflict with the junta, the UWSA leadership did not celebrate its anniversary last weekend.

“This year the Wa would have liked to celebrate forming the United Wa State Army. However, they were busy preparing their troops for conflict while cooperating closely with their allies,” said Sarawin.

In an indication of what may be in store, last weekend government troops exchanged gunfire with Kachin Independence Army (KIA) guerrillas near the jade mine of Hpacan in Kachin State.

Kachin sources said the incident, which lasted only a few minutes, was sparked when government troops crossed into KIA territory.

The KIA, like the UWSA and some other ethnic cease-fire groups, has not yet joined the BGF.

KIO holds militia courses ahead of army deadline

Mizzima - 20 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai – Kachin Independence Organisation troops are providing military training to people from the ethnic minority after the group refused to join the Burma Army’s Border Guard Force, local residents and group officers said.

This compulsory training will start today and will last 18 days. It will be attended by former Kachin Independence Army (KIA) soldiers from the KIO Third Brigade based in Mai Jayan and nearby villages, along with the persons who had already attended similar military trainings in the past.

A Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) officer said the training includes courses on self-defence, basic military tactics and small arms. “We train them how to shoot a gun, how to take cover and how to avoid being shot”, he said.

A local resident from Mai Jayan said more than 100 people were attending the courses and trainees’ were aged in their 40s to more than 50. “The training started today at the school in Mai Jayan”, he said.

Training will also be held at Inn Bapa village, where the KIA First Battalion under the command of the Third Brigade is based, 32 kilometres east of Mai Jayan. A witness said one person from each household was being collected as a trainee.

Similar short-term courses military training have been conducted in villages in Sadone Village tract, Wai Maw Township, east of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

KIO departmental staff had attended such training in Laiza in August last year.

Junta Military Affairs Security Chief Lieutenant General Ye Myint gave tomorrow as the deadline for the KIO to reply on whether it would bring its troops into line with the Border Guard Force.

According to a KIO Central Committee member, its nine-member delegation led by chairman Zau Hara will leave Laiza this evening to meet the junta’s Northern Command chief Soe Win on Thursday in Myitkyina.

The KIO’s vice-chief of staff, Major General Guan Mau, and General Secretary Dr. Laja held a debriefing on April 16 this month at Manau ground in Laiza, with 2,500 participants comprising Kachin people and staff of grass-roots groups. The group’s leaders explained its stance on the ceasefire period and the border force issue.

They said the group would reject the junta’s offer to join the force and that the group would like to join the Federal Army as Kachin Battalions, another KIO central committee member, who asked not to be named, said.

In a meeting held on April 4 at Northern Command headquarters in Myitkyina, the KIO had presented that position, but Lieutenant General Ye Myint refused the offer.

A day after the debriefing session, a series of bombs exploded at Myitsone hydropower dam project site. KIO has denied involvement.

KNG poll reveals Kachins against BGF

KNG - 20 April 2010

An online poll conducted by the Thailand-based website, the Kachin News Group's English version: www.kachinnews.com clearly reveals that people in the State are against the ethnic Kachin Army in northern Burma converting to the contentious Border Guard Force.

The poll titled "Should Kachin Independence Army (KIA) transform as a border security force?" raised three questions. Votes were cast by 1156 website visitors between May 4, 2009 and April 20, 2010.

Of the total voters, 90.6 per cent were against transforming KIA to the BGF --- 787 voters- 68.1 percent voted "No (rejecting BGF)"; 260 voters- 22.5 per cent voted "Never (strongly rejecting BGF)", and only 109 voters- 9.4 percent said "Yes (accepting BGF)" according to the poll graph.

The poll was set on May 4, last year when the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the political-wing of the KIA was officially informed by the country's ruling junta to transform the KIA to the Burmese Army controlled BGF.

The KNG's web trafficking result revealed Thailand was first as the country, which read the site the most, United States was second, China third and Burma was ninth among 10 countries, which read the KNG English version site the most.

Before the 2007 Saffron Revolution in military-ruled Burma the KNG website was totally blocked by the junta in the last leg of the same year and Burma was the fourth country to read the KNG website the most.

Snr-Gen Than Shwe's military regime has warned the KIO/KIA that its relations with the junta will have a retrograde effect and go back to the 1994 period - the pre-ceasefire situation - if the KIO/KIA does not respond clearly and accept the proposed BGF, KIO officials said.

Kachin people in Shan State and Kachin State are not in favour of transforming KIA to the BGF because the KIO and KIA were established to usher in complete political rights for Kachin people, according to leaders of Kachin communities in the two states.

Now, the KIO/KIA is preparing to defend itself against the Burmese Army but it will not start a war with the ruling junta, the rebel group officials reiterated.

If you want to check latest poll result, please log on to <http://kachinnews.com/Poll-results/Should-Kachin-Independence-Armey-KIA-transform-as-a-border-security-force.html>

Rakhine state ethnic party re-registers with poll watchdog

Mizzima - 20 April 2010

By Khaing Suu

New Delhi – An ethnic minority political party from Rakhine State has re-registered with the Election Commission in Naypyidaw, the party's chairman has said.

Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organisation chairman San Tha Aung said: "We, the ethnic minorities, are lagging in economic and social development. So, in order to promote the status of our people, we aim to contest the forthcoming election", San Tha Aung said.

The party is running more than 20 candidates for seats in Kyauk Taw, Palak Wa, Myouk Oo and Pouk Taw townships, where the ethnic group's power base live.

Seventy per cent of candidates ran in the 1990 election.

The population of Mro, also known as Khami, in Rakhine State was around 120,000, San Tha Aung said.

Kyaw Htun Khine and Aye Haung are vice-chairmen and La Bwai is party secretary.

The party, which re-registered on April 9, took part in the 1990 election under the symbol of a tap. Four candidates contested and only one candidate were won.

San Tha Aung said he was a teacher in Kyauk Taw, and a secretary and executive committee member of the People's Council of Kyauk Taw Township before the party was formed.

Similarly, the Union of Myanmar National Force (Arakan State) from Rakhine State tried to register on April 9, but their documentation was insufficient. So, they will register again after the Thingyan water festival holidays, party chairman Aye Kyaing told Mizzima.

Before April 9, sixteen new political parties had registered to contest the forthcoming elections and there are three existing parties re-registered with the commission; the National Unity Party, Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization and the Union of Karen League.

The new parties are the: 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar); Union of Myanmar National Political Force; Democratic Party; Karen People's Party, National Political Alliance, Pa-O National Organisation; Kachin State Progressive Party, Myanmar New Society Democratic Party; Difference and Peace Party; New Era People Party; Chin National Party; Union Democracy Party; Shan Nationalities Democratic Party; Palaung National Party; Nationalist (Wuntharhu) NLD (Union of Myanmar); and, the Wa Democratic Party.

[Arakanese Nationalist Party to Register with Election Commission](#)

Narinjara News – 21 April 2010

Sittwe: A newly formed Arakanese nationalist party is preparing to register with the Election Commission by the end of this month in order to run candidates in the upcoming election, said U Hla Saw, a policy-maker from the party.

He said, "We are now widely organizing all Arakanese politicians to participate in the party with leading roles because we want a strong independent political party for our state to carry out our people's interest."

The party was formed with a 15 central committee members, including five members from Rangoon and ten from 17 townships in Arakan State.

"We decided on the party's name but cannot disclose it before registering with the election commission. We will announce the party's name and our policies very soon," he added.

According to a source, the central members of the party assembled in a location in Rangoon on 20 April to discuss party affairs, including registration.

"We adopted some main objectives for the party, especially the following - to wipe out poverty in our state and to develop our culture, including our literature - but there are many other objectives in the party plan," he said.

Most of the party leaders are former members of the Arakan League for Democracy, Ratanya, Tetpoungu (Alliance force), and the League for Arakan Students and Youths, all of which registered with the Election Commission for the previous election in 1990.

This will become the second party from Arakan State to register with the Election Commission after the Mro and Khami National Solidarity Organization registered on 9 April.

[Final Days at NLD Party Headquarters](#)

Irrawaddy – 21 April 2010

By Kyi Wai

RANGOON — The red and white sign in front of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), headquarters in Rangoon will disappear in the next 15 days.

As a political party, the NLD gained the support of many people from different walks of life for more than 20 years. However, the party will be dissolved in May because of its decision on March 29 not to register as a political party and compete in the election this year.

For now, the ground floor of the headquarters is as lively and busy as before. Tables are occupied by members. Some have come to the office regularly for 20 years, working without a salary. Some of the workers have been imprisoned by the regime only to return upon their release.

A skinny young man and woman said they were waiting for Phyu Phyu Thin, an NLD member who works with HIV/AIDs and TB patients, providing medicine and shelter.

An man from Arakan State who has provided money to help support political prisoners is working at one of the tables. He said the wife of a political prisoner recently asked him if the NLD would continue to provide assistance to political prisoners.

"I had to tell her that I still didn't know, since we haven't said anything about it yet," said the man.

The party has contributed 5,000 to 8,000 kyat (about US \$5-8) to each political prisoner every month for 10 years. Currently, there are more than 2,100 political prisoners in prisons throughout the country.

Other current party activities include cleaning water wells damaged by Cyclone Nargis in areas where people still have difficulty finding access to drinkable water. Such projects will be harder to undertake in the future, he said.

"But despite the dissolution of our party, we will continue in our struggle for democracy and there will be political activities," he said.

In the office, members also work on such issues as how to keep office equipment, records and other assets belonging to the party. In the future, said one member, it will be difficult for a group of former members to meet together.

"Even if the NLD existed as a legal political party, we could be arrested. So, if there's no NLD and we meet somewhere even for social purposes, do you think we can avoid being harassed? How are we going to meet?" said a member from Mandalay Division.

A MP-elect from Pegu Division in the 1990 election said military intelligence officers constantly pressured him and others to resign from the NLD, saying that they would be paid as much as 10 million kyat (about \$10,000).

He said that MP-elects in Pegu Division refused the offer, saying "We won't leave the NLD, you can jail us," and many ended up in prison or what the regime called "government guesthouses."

He said many MP-elects were able to focus on politics only because of the support from their family.

"My wife has taken care of my family throughout my time in politics," he said. "She is not in favor of the NLD's dissolution."

MP-elect Sein Hla Oo said during the NLD meeting on March 29 that if the party was dissolved, he would feel as if half of his heart was taken away.

"I am not happy with the fact that our decision will lead to the end of our organization," said Tin Oo, the NLD vice chairman. "On the other hand, I am proud of others and myself for making such a dignified decision."

Quoting Aung San Suu Kyi, who said the NLD would not be destroyed even if it was dissolved, he said it would continue its activities and struggle for democracy.

Veteran NLD leader Win Tin also said that the party has a future.

"Some say the NLD may become an underground organization if it doesn't re-register," he said. "We will continue our activities in peaceful and non-violent ways."

In a letter to the public, the party affirmed that under the leadership of Suu Kyi it would continue its aims and objectives.

It's clear the party's social work will go on.

"We have decided to offer food to monks in front of our office until May 4," said Dr. May Win Myint, a leader of the NLD women's wing. "We will continue to do so after that, but it may not be here."

"We also think about the continuation of our prayer every Tuesday for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners," she said.

20/04/2010

News

[US Senators Want Burma Policy Assessed](#)

Irrawaddy – 20 April 2010

By Lalit K. Jha

WASHINGTON — US senator Judd Gregg has introduced a resolution calling on US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to assess whether the Obama administration policy of engagement with the Burmese military junta has been effective in furthering US interests.

The resolution, co-sponsored by six other senators, also calls for the immediate release of detained National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and calls on the Secretary of State to support the NLD and the people of Burma in demanding constitutional and election reforms that will improve human rights, broaden political participation and further democracy, accountability and responsive governance in Burma.

The resolution asks the Obama administration to maintain, and consider strengthening, sanctions against Burma if the military regime continues its systematic violation of human rights and fails to embrace the democratic aspirations of the people of Burma.

It also urges the Secretary of State to engage regional governments and multilateral organizations (including China, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the United Nations Security Council) to push for the establishment of an environment in Burma that encourages the full and unfettered participation of the people of Burma in a democratic transition to civilian rule.

Condemning the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Burma, the resolution calls for their immediate and unconditional release and urges the Burmese military regime to engage in dialogue with the NLD and other opposition groups, as well as with ethnic minorities, to broaden political participation in an environment free from fear and intimidation.

The resolution notes that Snr-Gen Than Shwe and the State Peace and Development Council continue to persecute Suu Kyi, her supporters and the ordinary citizens of Burma, including ethnic minorities.

The senators co-sponsoring the resolution were Judd Greg, Mitch McConnell, Bob Bennett, Sam Brownback, Susan M. Collins, Joseph Lieberman and Patrick Leahy.

[Japan and Malaysia urge free elections](#)

AFP/DVB - 20 April 2010

Japan and Malaysia urged Burma on Monday to hold "free, fair and inclusive" general elections, government officials said.

Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak, who began his first visit to Tokyo as leader on Sunday, held talks with his Japanese counterpart Yukio Hatoyama after meeting Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko earlier in the day.

'The two leaders... expressed their hope that the holding of general elections in Myanmar [Burma] this year would be free, fair and inclusive, thus contributing to Myanmar's stability and development,' they said in a statement.

Critics have said that elections planned for this year will lack credibility because of laws that effectively bar opposition leader and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part.

The poll will be the country's first election in two decades, but Suu Kyi's political party has called for a boycott over rules that would have forced it to expel her as leader if it wanted to participate.

Military commander critically injured in Rangoon blasts

Mizzima - 19 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – A regional commander of the Burmese Army was critically injured in one of the three bomb explosions at the X2O pavilion in Kandawgyi, Rangoon on April 15, the second day of the traditional water festival, it is learnt.

The bombs exploded in quick succession at the X2O pavilion, when the Rangoon Division No. 4 Military Region Commander Col. Ohn Cho was inspecting the pavilion as part of his monitoring tour of water festival centres. Shrapnel from the second bomb hit him in the abdomen. He was admitted to the Mingaladon Military Hospital.

Earlier, the junta said that eight people were killed and about 170 people were injured in the serial blasts but some police sources said that the death toll is mounting.

The explosions killed a Police Colonel and a Sub-Inspector. The Mingala Taungnyunt Township Peace and Development Council Chairman was critically injured.

Among the 44 injured still being treated in the Rangoon General Hospital, 20 are critical.

Two days after the bomb blasts, Zeya, son of writer Linyone (Eagle) Maung Maung, and his son Sithu Zeya were picked up from their homes for questioning, a person close to the family said.

"The father son duo was taken away from their homes in the evening of the Burmese New Year. The team was made up of local authorities and the Police Special Branch (SB) took them in for questioning. They did not say why they were detained," a family member, who wished not to be named, said.

The literary circle in Rangoon felt the arrest was on suspicion of their taking photographs of the blast site.

In some townships and ward level Peace and Development Council offices, the authorities announced a Kyat 1 million award for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators of the blast.

Rangoon Blasts Target Junta Chief's Grandson?

Irrawaddy – 19 April 2010

By Nayee Lin Let

Explosions in Rangoon on Thursday appear to have targeted Nay Shwe Thway Aung, the grandson of junta chief Sr-Gen Than Shwe, according to a description provided by army and police sources on Monday.

According to sources at the Rangoon Division Command (RDC), Nay Shwe Thway Aung was visiting the site of the New Year Water Festival on Kandawgyi Road and had arrived near the X2O pavilion just before the blasts.

A senior official said the explosions occurred while officials from the Rangoon Great Thingyan Disciplinary Committee were conducting a check of pavilions amid reports that the junta leader's grandson would visit.

All of the sources who described the scene prior to the blasts asked for anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the incident.

“Nay Shwe Thway Aung attended the festival at his own pavilion in front of the RDC compound on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road and also visited around Kandawgyi Road by car,” said a military security official.

According to a police source, Nay Shwe Thway Aung's car was behind security forces while they were checking the X2O pavilion.

Someone began distributing free cigarettes, which caused a crowd to gather, said a police source.

It is not clear if the explosions were caused by bombs or hand grenades. One senior military security official said hand grenades were thrown into the crowd.

A police officer said the explosions appeared to have targeted Nay Shwe Thway Aung and his entourage because many of the injured were security personnel.

“If cigarettes were not distributed, many people would not have been killed or wounded,” he said.

The source said no children or grandchildren of the junta's top officials were killed in the explosions.

Meanwhile, 20 people remain in intensive care at Rangoon General Hospital, and 86 men and 29 women are listed in serious condition. Eight people died in the blasts, according to a state-run newspaper.

KIO Meets Junta Officials after Dam Bombings

Irrawaddy – 19 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) officials met with their junta counterparts in Myintkyina, the capital of Kachin State, on Monday, following a series of bomb blasts at the Myitsone dam site on Saturday.

The meeting also comes a few days before the KIO deadline on Thursday to reply to the junta's order to form a border guard force.

According to sources in Laiza, the KIO headquarters, a delegation led by Brig-Gen Sumlut Gun Maw, vice chief of staff of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and a central committee member, traveled to Myintkyina on Sunday.

“The trip is for an emergency meeting,” said a KIO source who spoke on condition of anonymity. “The Kachin delegation and the junta officials are expected to discuss the blasts at the Myitsone dam project site. The delegation is scheduled to return to Laiza on Monday.”

Brig-Gen Thein Zaw, minister of communication, post and telegraph and a central executive member of the junta-back Union Solidarity and Development Association for Kachin State, reportedly attended the meeting with Maj-Gen Soe Win, the commander of the North Military Regional Command.

The Chinese-sponsored Myitsone dam project near Myitkyina was hit by 26 bomb blasts on Saturday, according to a local source, which said 12 bombs failed to explode.

The Kachin News Agency in Chiang Mai reported that four Chinese technicians died and 12 were injured in the blasts.

Environmental activists and local residents have protested against the dam project, saying it will damage the livelihoods of area residents and harm the ecology along the Irrawaddy River, Burma's main waterway.

Sources said some regime officials have privately blamed the KIO for the bombings.

“Some junta officials want to accuse the KIO in the blasts. But that's nonsense. The KIO was not involved,” said a source in Laiza. He said someone who wanted to damage relations between the KIO and Chinese authorities was probably behind the attack.

The bombings come amid rising tension between the junta and ethnic armed groups over the border guard force plan, under which ethnic cease-fire groups have been ordered to transform into a border guard force under by the Tatmadaw (Burmese armed forces).

Junta officials including Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the chief of Military Affairs Security, formerly known as the Military Intelligence Service, who is also the negotiator with cease-fire groups, have said that ethnic armed groups would face legal actions if they fail to join the border guard plan by April 22, which has been interpreted to mean that they would be declared unlawful organizations, possibly by April 28.

Sources on the Sino-Burmese border said junta officials have used a rougher tone during meetings in late March and early April involving the KIO, the United Wa State Army and the National Democratic Alliance Army.

The Kachin delegation was also expected to talk about the border guard force issue in Myitkyina following the KIO meeting.

"Until now, the KIO has not changed its stance, which supports the 'Union Defense Force' concept under the Panglong [agreement] spirit," said a KIO source, referring to a 1947 agreement that granted the Kachin and other ethnic groups full autonomy in internal administration of frontier areas.

Meanwhile, on Thursday three bombs exploded in Rangoon during a New Year Festival celebration, killing eight people and injuring 170, according to a state-run newspaper. A bomb blast also occurred on the same day at the main Sino-Burmese border trade gate in Muse, known as the 105-mile gate. No one was injured.

The Sino-Burmese border trade through Muse and Laiza is normal, said a businessman contacted by *The Irrawaddy*, despite the bombing in Muse.

The New Mon State Party, a cease-fire group based on the Thai-Burmese border, will meet with junta officials in Moulmein, the headquarters of the Southeast Regional Military Command, on Thursday, and The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army cease-fire group will meet with junta officials on Saturday to discuss the border guard force order.

[Kachins Gear up for War, Peace](#)

Irrawaddy - 19 April 2010

By Tini Tran / AP Writer

LAIZA, Kachin State—Crawling on their bellies, the recruits inch through a field, dragging wooden rifles. A whistle blows, and they scramble to their knees, pulling the pins from imaginary grenades before lobbing them. Dropping flat, they yell "Boom!"

At a camp alongside a river, the next generation of soldiers in the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), one of Burma's largest armed ethnic groups, is training with a new urgency. A cease-fire is in peril, and the Kachin do not want to patrol the border for the ruling junta.

"I don't want to kill anyone, but being a soldier is the best way to change the conditions in Burma," said 23-year-old cadet La Ran, who joined four months ago. "I am ready to fight if I have to."

The possibility of armed conflict in Burma, also known as Myanmar, is rising because a series of cease-fire agreements between the military government and more than a dozen armed ethnic groups is dissolving as the regime seeks to press those groups into becoming a border militia under government control.

The government has set a deadline of April 28 for the armed groups to merge or disarm as the junta tightens its grip on the country ahead of this year's nationwide elections—the first in two decades. Their demands have largely been met with resistance during negotiations over the past year with the country's largest armed ethnic groups, including the 8,000-member Kachin army.

Burma's government, run by ethnic Burmese who make up the majority, is well known for repressing its own people. Considered among the world's most brutal, the regime brooks no dissent and has been accused of large-scale violations of human rights, including the years long detention of Nobel Peace Prize laureate and democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi.

In the country's hinterlands—home to a variety of ethnic minority groups—the junta has also faced bitter opposition from the Wa, the Shan, the Karen and the Kachin, who are united in their resentment against

historical domination by the Burmese. The Karen and the Shan, who have refused to sign truces, are engaged in intense fighting with government troops.

These groups control large territories along the northern and eastern borders—along with the valuable trade in logging, jade, gems, gold, and, in some cases, illegal drugs, that have helped finance their insurgencies.

The Kachin, predominantly Christian hill tribes in the northernmost part of Burma, have been engaged in a decades-long struggle against the government for autonomy.

Since a cease-fire was signed in 1994, they have enjoyed de-facto self-rule: In the rebel-controlled area, the Kachin army powers the electric grid and runs hospitals while soldiers in green uniforms adorned with the Kachin flag monitor both the border with China and the frontier with government-controlled Burma.

But Kachin leaders are still hoping for a permanent solution. In the interim, they have rebuilt their army and their strength.

Over the weekend, the Kachin army and its political arm, the Kachin Independence Organization, adamantly rejected the government's border guard proposal at a mass public meeting held in the small town of Laiza, a rebel stronghold near the Chinese border.

"From the very beginning, the public didn't want the KIA to join the [border guard force]," said Gen S Gun Maw, the vice chief of staff for the rebels, citing letters from thousands of people opposing the idea. "If they [the government] take the military way, it will be a big mistake for them."

Pulling up in trucks, motorbikes, buses and cars, more than 1,000 Kachin—many dressed in traditional headscarves and sarong-like longyi—packed into a large assembly hall. An overflow crowd watched intently on television monitors set up in a second room.

From the start, the rebel leaders were careful to say their stand reflects the views of the majority of Kachin people, estimated at 1 million in Burma. Many in the audience nodded in agreement as their leaders outlined the political stalemate after more than a dozen talks with government leaders over the past 12 months.

"We've had the cease-fire for more than 10 years now. It's a friendly peaceful society now, and I want to keep this. But [the government] violates our rights and takes our land," said Zing Hang Khawn H pang, 45, a local trader who attended the weekend meeting.

The gathering was also intended to make a rare appeal for international attention and a small group of foreign journalists, including *The Associated Press*, were invited to attend. The remote and mountainous Kachin region has largely been off-limits to foreigners for years.

"Not many outsiders know very well what's happening in Burma and our region ... We hope that if they know, if they understand the situation in our region, they may be able to find a way to help us," Gun Maw said.

In Laiza, a border town of 10,000 nestled in a valley between green hills, the standard of living is better than in other impoverished areas of Burma.

Control over two small hydroelectric dams, built with Chinese help, provide the area with 24-hour electricity—by comparison, residents in the largest Burmese city, Rangoon, only get a few hours of power every third day. Chinese telecommunications towers just over the border ensure steady cell phone service, while brisk commercial trade means a steady supply of Chinese goods, clothing and motorbikes displayed in storefronts on the main boulevard.

On the streets, people talk openly about politics—another marked difference from the tightly controlled regions of government-run Burma.

The stability has allowed Christianity, brought by missionaries in the 1800s, to flourish—a rare display in an otherwise heavily Buddhist nation.

Standing outside the doors of the white-tiled Laiza Kachin Baptist Church, resident Dau Lum, 36, expressed faith that a political compromise can be reached before fighting erupts.

"I try not to worry too much because the world is watching Burma so the Burmese government doesn't want to start the fight. Even if conflict happens, it will not be like those in the past. I believe that God will guide us to a good future," he said.

Though Kachin leaders are still pushing for a political solution that includes protection of ethnic rights and government-recognized self-rule, their commanders are preparing for the worst. From the Kachin army's headquarters, perched high up on the mountainside overlooking the town, they have launched a new push for training and recruitment.

More ominously, the Burmese side has also stepped up its military activities. Kachin residents report army convoys rumbling through the northern countryside in recent weeks near the regional capital of Myitkyina, which is under government control.

But any fighting in northern Burma would surely provoke China, the junta's biggest political ally, which has warned the Burmese government to guard against instability on its borders. Last summer, heavy fighting between troops and the Kokang ethnic group sent some 30,000 refugees across the border into China, prompting a rare reprimand from Beijing.

The Chinese leadership is in a bind, caught between its dislike of border instability and its access to the oil, natural gas, and timber that the junta provides. That makes it hard to divine how deeply Beijing will involve itself.

"We know the Chinese government has influence over the (Burmese government). We want them to use this to make change in Burma, but we're not sure whether the Chinese government will," said the Kachin army's Gun Maw.

Lamai Tang Gun, 59, a Baptist pastor from Myitkyina, notes the Kachin have lived with an uneasy peace for decades: "They (the junta) are always threatening us. We can't tell if there's a possibility of fighting. We can only pray to God."

[SEC gives NMSP a "pre-ceasefire relationship" ultimatum](#)

IMNA – 19 April 2010

By Kon Hadae

According to reports, an April 7th meeting between New Mon State Party (NMSP) members and the Southeast Command (SEC) involved the latter placing substantial pressure on the NMSP to accept the Burmese government's Border Guard Force (BGF) agreement, at the risk of the government's 1995 ceasefire agreement with the NMSP.

According to an NMSP Central Committee member, who asked that his name be withheld, SEC Lt. Gen. Ye Myint reportedly stated that a NMSP failure to convert its armed wing, the Mon New Liberation Army (MNLA) into a government-run Border Guard Force (BGF) or people's militia, by April 22nd of this year, will result in the reinstatement of the "pre-ceasefire relationship" between the Burmese Government and the NMSP.

The NMSP issued a public refusal of the Burmese government's BGF offer in August 2009, which resulted in the Burmese government's withdrawal of the party's taxation rights in September of that year.

The Central Committee member IMNA spoke with reported that the meeting, which was held in Moulmein's SEC headquarters, was attended by 7 NMSP officers: Joint Secretary Nai Chan Toi, Vice Chairman Nai Rotsa, CEC Nai Htar Wara, CEC Nai Tala Nyi, Colonel Nai Layi Ka kao, CC Nai Kow Seik, and CC member Nai Chan Nai. The meeting was led by Gen. Ye Myint.

"He [Gen. Ye Myint] told us the NMSP could decide to do what it wants. But if we refuse to accept both the Border Guard Force and People's Militia agreements, the SPDC will view us as they did before the ceasefire," an NMSP insider claimed.

Gen Ye Myint gave the NMSP a deadline of April 22nd to submit their final answer regarding the MNLA's fate, he added.

The NMSP agreed to a ceasefire with the current Burmese military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), in 1995 an attempt to extinguish the vast amounts of human rights abuses that were then being suffered by the Mon people. The SPDC's "pre-ceasefire relationship" with Mon State resulted in, among other abuses, widespread forced labor, mass forced relocation of Mon communities, tens of thousands of Mon "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) living in squalid refugee camp conditions on the Thailand-Burma border, and the commencement of the construction of the infamous Yanada gas pipeline in 1991.

A NMSP spokesperson informed IMNA that the NMSP is currently in the process of gathering its members for an emergency meeting to discuss the ultimatum, at the party's headquarters near the [Bee Ree river] in Ye Township; word of the exact nature of what the NMSP's decision will has not yet been disclosed.

[Leading Parties Stay Away from Election](#)

Irrawaddy – 19 April 2010

By Ko Htwe

Nineteen political parties to date have submitted applications to the Union Election Commission to take part in the Burmese general election later this year. However, most of the leading parties from the previous election, in 1990, have said they will not compete.

Of the 19 political parties that have registered, 16 are new parties, while only three are existing parties—the Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization (MKNSO); the National Unity Party (NUP); and the Union Karen League (UKL).

The seven other existing parties—including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD)—have either not registered to date or have announced that they will not compete in the election due to the recent election law and the 2008 Constitution, both of which are regarded by observers as serving only to entrench military rule in Burma.

The notable exception is the NUP, formerly known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party, led by late dictator Gen Ne Win. In the 1990 election, the NUP came fourth with 10 seats and to date is the only major party to register.

In 1990, the MKNSO won one seat; the UKL won none.

The leading parties ahead of the NUP in 1990 were the NLD with a landslide 392 seats, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) with 23 seats, and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), which won 11 seats. None are expected to register before the deadline on May 6.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Monday, Aye Thar Aung, the secretary of the ALD, said, "Most of the existing parties have not registered because they cannot accept the 2008 Constitution. The election will go ahead, I'm sure, but I don't think it will be free, fair and inclusive."

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political commentator living in exile, said that the existing political parties did not register with the Election Commission because most are allied with the NLD. Some parties, such as the SNLD, have had their leader arrested and so will not compete. Others believe the election will not be free and fair, he said.

"The parties that have registered to date are not allied with the NLD," he added.

Of the 16 newly formed parties that have applied for registration, seven are ethnic minority-based parties: the Kachin State Progressive Party, led by Dr. Tu Ja; the Kayin People's Party, which is headed by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the Shan Nationals Democratic Party, led by Sai Ai Pao; the Pa-O National Organization, led by Aung Kham Hti, a former monk and a politician who had a close relationship with former premier Gen Khin Nyunt; the Chin National Party; the Wa Democratic Party; and the Taaung (Palaung) National Party.

Rangoon-based parties to register include: the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, headed by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising; and the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM), led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin.

The GSUM is distinct from the original 88 Students Generation group, led by prominent former students—including Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi—who are now in prison.

Aye Lwin, a 46-year-old former political prisoner, started his own political group in 2005. His close contacts with regime officials (he had a meeting with Rangoon's mayor, Maj-Gen Aung Thein Lin, five months ago) have made him unpopular with young activists, who accuse him of accepting substantial financial support from them.

The remaining registered parties include the Democratic Party, which is led by Thu Wai, a former political prisoner. After the 1990 election, the Democratic Party was abolished.

Also registered are: the Union Democratic Party, headed by Shan leader Shwe Ohn; the Difference and Peace Party, led by Nyo Min Lwin; the New Era People Party, which is led by Tun Aung Kyaw; the National Political Alliance Party, led by Ohn Lwin; the Wunthanu NLD (the Union of Myanmar) party; and the Myanmar New Society Democratic Party.

Junta raking candidate backgrounds

DVB - 20 April 2010

By Ahunt Phone Myat

Burmese authorities are reportedly collecting information on the backgrounds of candidates looking to contest elections this year, the head of a registered party has said.

The 19 parties that have so far registered for Burma's first elections in 20 years, rumoured to be in October, are yet to receive an approval.

But, according to Aye Lwin, chairperson of the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP), one of the more prominent parties looking to run this year, the group learnt recently that checks were being carried out on the histories of party members.

"[The authorities] are officially collecting background information on about 27 or 28 [Central Executive Committee candidates]," he said. Fifteen of those belong to the UMFNP, while the rest are members of the closely-allied 88 Generation Students (Union of Myanmar), a party led by his younger brother, Ye Htun.

Aye Lwin, known to have close ties with the ruling junta, was a student activist in the 1988 uprising against military rule before switching sides and campaigning against international sanctions on Burma.

The deadline for parties to register expires in the second week of May. Ohn Lwin, communications officer for the National Political Alliances, speculated that the approvals would be given by the Election Commission (EC) once the deadline is up.

"It is likely that the [EC] is waiting until they get [applications] from everyone," he said. "We are waiting to be informed and will not yet start our [campaign] activities, such as releasing statements; we are worried that we will be seen as crossing boundaries if we start now."

Out of the 19 parties registered, 16 have been formed in the past few months. The majority of these are either outwardly pro-junta or part of the so-called 'third force' in Burmese politics that are allied to neither incumbent nor opposition.

It is unclear what role these parties will play in a post-election Burma: observers have said that the polls are little more than a show of legitimacy for the ruling junta, which will continue its hold on power under the guise of a civilian government.

One of the registered parties, the Kachin State Progressive Party, is comprised of members of three Kachin ceasefire groups, including the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO).

The KIO is now at loggerheads with the ruling junta following its refusal to transform into a Border Guard Force (BFG), and military analysts have warned that fighting may break out.

The BGF issue is seen as a means for the junta to shore up support and bolster its army size in the run-up to elections, with border units ostensibly coming under the command of Naypyidaw.

NUP Member Cards Issued in Maungdaw

Narinjara News – 20 April 2010

Maungdaw: The ID cards for members of the National United Party, NUP, have been issued in Maungdaw Township on the western Burmese border by township NUP leaders to promote their party organizing campaign in the area for the upcoming election, reported a former NUP member.

He said, "The membership ID cards are being issued to party members in Maungdaw Township after the party registered with the election commission on 29 March, 2010. The NUP is now undertaking activities for the election in Maungdaw Township."

The Maungdaw Township NUP is led by U Kyaw Aye, who is the former president of the Maungdaw Township Burma Socialist Programme Party, but most of the other party leaders in the township are Muslim.

"The NUP is now gearing up its organizing campaign among the Muslim community in the township because they are a majority in the area and Muslim votes are key in deciding the election. Muslim leaders, who are former village chairmen during the time of the BSPP, are supporting the party," the source added.

The township NUP committee members are now visiting many rural villages to mobilize local Muslim residents to support the party in the election.

A Muslim businessman from Maungdaw said, "Some Muslims have joined the NUP but not very many because our people seem to dislike the party. However, I could not tell you which party is most favorable among the Muslim community in Maungdaw at present."

Even though the NUP is gearing up its election campaign, the party has not yet declared who will represent the party for the Maungdaw constituency in the election.

Meanwhile, two prominent Muslim businessmen - Aung Zaw Win and Aung Naing - who are close associates of SPDC generals, are now mobilizing the Muslim community to support the USDA party in the township.

According to a source, even though the USDA party has not yet registered with the election commission, the party central committee in Maungdaw Township has already been formed under the supervision of the two businessmen.

Many people believe that the NUP and the USDA parties will be the main contenders in the election, despite that they are pro-military junta parties with close alliances to the current regime, report sources.

19/04/2010

News

Four killed, 12 injured in bomb blasts in Irrawaddy-Myitsone dam site

KNG - 17 April 2010

Four people died and over 12 people were injured when exploding bombs for the first time rocked the Myitsone dam project in Irrawaddy River in Kachin State, northern Burma, said local residents. Most of the dead and injured were Chinese workers.

At least three bombs exploded in quick succession in front of Asia World Company's office, one of the implementing agencies of the dam project in Lungga Zup, 18 miles north of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, at about 4:45 a.m. Burma Standard Time, residents said.

The explosions also resulted in severe damage to the company's two-storey office, said residents in the dam project site. Several company-owned cars trucks and bulldozers were also destroyed in the blasts.

Over 300 Chinese workers employed with the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) were evacuated in four buses to Myitkyina soon after the explosion.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the first ever bomb explosions in the Myitsone dam project, said the sources.

Significantly, the bomb explosions occurred one day after the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) took pains to apprise the Kachin public about the latest situation of disagreement on transforming the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of KIO to the junta-proposed BGF.

Naw Awng, leader of the anti-dam movement and All Kachin Students' Union (AKSU), an underground Kachin students' organization based in Kachin State told Kachin News Group, "We harbour no policy of violence. The explosion may have been triggered by anti-dam civilians or secret groups or organizations".

The dam for the hydropower project at the confluence of the Irrawaddy River, or Mali Hka in Kachin, which is formed where the two major rivers--- Mali Hka River and N'Mai Hka River meet, is being implemented by the Asia World Company, Ministry of Electric Power-1 in Burma and Chinese state-owned China Power Investment Corporation (CPI).

Inspection activities for the project were started in late 2006 however the joint-dam construction began in December 21, last year. The construction cost, technicians and equipment are provided by the Chinese government.

The project will generate 6000 MW of electricity, which is to be sold to neighbouring China's Yunnan province for it is under construction industrial zone.

Kachin people, organizations and churches have urged the military supremo Snr-Gen Than Shwe to halt the Myitsone, or Mali-N'Mai Zup dam project and are into demonstrations and anti-dam movements at home and abroad.

[Junta adamant about continuing dam project despite blast](#)

KNG - 18 April 2010

The Burmese military junta is adamant about continuing with the Irrawaddy Myitsone dam project in Kachin State despite the serial bomb blasts at the site yesterday, which killed four Chinese workers and injured 12.

The announcement comes less than 24 hours after the explosion.

Maj-Gen Soe Win, Commander of Northern Regional Command told people in the dam project sites that the project would continue. He was addressing a public meeting in Chyinghkrang village, 25 miles north of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State today between 11 a.m. and noon local time, said participants.

Yesterday at about 2:45 a.m., a series of bombs exploded in the main offices of the dam construction company in five different places in Lungga Zup and Chyinghkrang Villages. The explosions were triggered by unknown groups or organizations and nobody has claimed responsibility.

Four workers were killed and at least 12 injured, sources at the project site said. The affected buildings housed Chinese technicians and engineers of the China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) which is implementing the project along with a Burmese company.

The bodies of the Chinese, the injured workers along with over 300 workers were brought quickly to the China border in four large buses along Myitkyina-Waingmaw-Kambaiti Road yesterday morning, said local eyewitnesses.

Meanwhile, Commander Soe Win addressed the people and asked them to protect the dam site from any further attack with the cooperation of military authorities, said meeting participants.

Hundreds of Chinese workers employed with the Burma-Asia World Company, the other implementing firm, have fled to Myitkyina and Waingmaw towns and are trying to return home in China through the border, said villagers in the project site.

115 Rangoon Bomb Victims Still in Intensive Care

Irrawaddy – 17 April 2010

By Kyaw Thein Kha

Out of 170 people injured in three bomb explosions on Thursday at a Rangoon pavilion celebrating the Burmese New Year, 115 people remain in intensive care, a state-run newspaper said on Saturday.

State-run newspapers said terrorists were responsible for the blasts, but no group was named.

CNN reported 20 people were killed. Other reports said 24 died.

The chairman of the township Peace and Development Council was reportedly injured.

State TV said on Friday that eight people died and 75 were injured, and it blamed “destructive elements” for the attacks.

The three bomb blasts struck the X2O pavilion near the Theinbyu driving track on Kandawgyi Lake in Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township at 3 p.m.

Rangoon General Hospital's Intensive Care Unit declined to provide any information when contacted by *The Irrawaddy*.

Following the blasts, security personnel reportedly fled from the scene, according to sources.

The United States condemned the blasts on Thursday, saying the explosions victimized innocent civilians.

“We condemn any kind of violence that victimized innocent civilians. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those who were the victims of this bombing,” said State Department spokesman Philip Crowley.

Tensions between the government and various ethnic groups have increased in recent months, and the country is also facing its first political election in 20 years sometime later this year. The country's most prominent political party, the National League for Democracy, recently decided not to contest in the election and faces dissolution.

The bombing was the worst incident of its kind since the bombing of two supermarkets and a convention center in Rangoon in May 2005, which killed 19 people and injured more than 160. The government said unnamed ethnic armed groups were responsible.

18 Arakanese Among 170 Wounded in Bomb Blasts at Rangoon Water Festival

Narinjara News – 19 April 2010

Rangoon: 18 Arakanese were among the 170 people injured in bomb blasts during the New Year's water festival in Rangoon on 14 April, reports an Arakanese community leader from Rangoon.

"18 Arakanese were among the wounded in the water festival bomb blasts, most are women," he said.

Three bombs exploded at X20 pavilion near Kandawgyi Lake in the former capital Rangoon on 14 April, killing five men and three women, and injuring 170 people.

"18 Arakanese people were wounded in the bomb blasts when they were crossing the pavilion to go to the traditional Arakanese water festival that was being held at Thein Pyu Ground," the source added.

Two of the victims, identified as Ma Ye Ye Kyaw from Kyauktaw Township and Min Min Hein from Ann Township, suffered serious injuries.

According to an Arakanese community source, ten people from Kyauktaw Township are among the wounded, identified as Daw Aye Aye Kyin, Daw Shwe Yin, Ma Moe Moe Than, Ma Htay Htay Yin, Daw Mya Yin, Daw Tin Ye, Daw Win Chay, Daw Khaing Khaing Aye, and U Zaw Win Tun.

U Hla Myint and San Kyaw Maung from Ponna Kyunt Township, and Ma Let, U Soe Naing, Ma Htwe Htwe Yee, Maung Mrat Moe Naing, and Min Min Hein from Ann Township are also among the wounded.

All are taken to Rangoon general hospital for treatment.

A relative of one victim reported that the condition of the wounded is improving after treatment at the hospital, saying they will recover very soon.

The Arakanese traditional water festival was held at Thein Pyu Grounds in Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township with 14 water playing pavilions where thousands of Arakanese who are living in Rangoon participated in the festival.

During the last day of the festival, there were not many people at the Arakanese water festival because people had avoided it out of fear of further bomb blasts.

[Newspaper Blames Rangoon Bombs on Exiled Groups](#)

Irrawaddy – 19 April 2010

By Kyaw Thein Kha

Exiled Burmese opposition groups were responsible for the bombing of a pavilion in Rangoon, according to a commentary in a state-run newspaper on Sunday, which said the groups provided terrorist training to migrant workers.

Three bomb blasts caused nine deaths and injured 170 people, according to official reports.

An article in *The Mirror* newspaper said, "The National League for Democracy (NLD Liberated Area), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the Vigorous Burmese Students' Warriors (VBSW) dispatched the terrorists into the country for violent and deadly attacks."

The article did not provide any evidence for the accusations. It alleged that foreigners from Western countries recruited Burmese refugees, trained them in the use of bombs and mines and gave them money to carry out attacks inside the country.

The Rangoon Division Criminal Investigation Department declined to comment on the investigation when contacted by *The Irrawaddy* on Monday.

Speaking with *The Irrawaddy* on Sunday, Moe Zaw Oo, a NLD-LA spokesperson, said, "The regime has accused ethnic armed groups and exiled groups for bomb blasts inside the country in the past. I expected they would accuse us in this case."

He said the accusation is meant to discredit the NLD party which recently decided not to contest the 2010 election being held under the 2008 Constitution, which the NLD said is undemocratic. The party will be dissolved by the regime next month.

Some political analysts have said the bombings could be work of dissident generals within the army.

The construction permit for the X2O pavilion where the bombings occurred was auctioned off with several bids from the sons and daughters of generals.

Salai Yaw Aung, the ABSDF vice general secretary, said, "We deny the accusation concerning the bombings. The ABSDF has never made such an attack. We are an armed group, but we have never attacked the public."

"The problem could be based on tensions among the military generals and among the children of the generals," he said.

Meanwhile, a series of seven bombings occurred at the Myitsone Dam project in Kachin State on Saturday. Authorities have not made any statement about who might be responsible for the attack.

BGF Impasse explained to people by Kachin leaders

KNG - 17 April 2010

Ethnic Kachin leaders in northern Burma today took pains to explain to the people the impasse on the Border Guard Force (BGF) issue with the country's ruling junta. The public meeting comes before the crucial junta-set deadline of April 22 for transforming the Kachin armed forces.

The public meeting was organized in Laiza, the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in east Kachin State, near the China border. Over 2400 KIO members and members of the public from two states—Kachin and Shan were the audience. Two senior KIO officers took on the onerous task of explaining to the people, said participants.

Dr. Lahkyen La Ja, KIO general secretary detailed all the discussions with the junta on transforming the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of the KIO to the junta-proposed BGF.

According to Dr. La Ja, the two sides met 15 times on the contentious BGF issue in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State since April 28, last year. The issue could not be negotiated because the junta kept pressing the KIA to transform to BGF.

He quoted Burmese military officials as saying that the BGF proposal was the brainchild of junta supremo Snr-Gen Than Shwe and is a goodwill gesture by the military leader.

Brig-Gen Sumlut Gun Maw, Vice Chief of Staff of KIA said that the KIO was told to come up with a clear response on the BGF regarding acceptance by Lt-Gen Ye Myint, Chief of the junta's Military Affairs Security (MAS) when the KIO delegates met him in Myitkyina on April 4.

In the last meeting, Lt-Gen Ye Myint made it abundantly clear that the KIO has to provide a clear answer on the BGF issue on April 22. Following, which the armed-wing must be transformed within two weeks from April 28, said Brig-Gen Gun Maw.

Lt-Gen Ye Myint also cautioned about the cancellation of the ceasefire agreement saying "If the KIO does not abide by the latest instructions, the relations will revert to the period before the 1994 ceasefire agreement," the KIA's Vice Chief of Staff added.

Meanwhile, the latest KIO proposal was sent to Snr-Gen Than Shwe yesterday.

The proposal states that the KIO would like to resolve the BGF issue by peaceful alternative means, not militarily. It wants to convert the KIA to the Union Defence Force under the Burmese Army, maintaining its current status, said Dr. La Ja.

The KIO reiterated to the junta that it would like to convert the KIA after the political imbroglio is resolved through dialogue.

The KIO delegates will meet Burmese military officials again on April 22 and it is expected to explain its latest proposal instead of coming up with a clear response on the BGF issue as sought by the junta, said KIO officials in Laiza.

Till now, there is no sign of impending civil war between the KIO and the ruling junta, said local military observers.

RRC organizes meeting in Cox's Bazaar to drive the Rohingya refugee

KPN - 17 April 2010

Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh: The Rohingya Resistance Committee (RRC) held a meeting about Rohingya refugees on April 15 at Cox's Bazaar town, according to sources.

At a Press Conference they said "We don't want more Rohingya people in our country (Bangladesh) and we don't want to settle Rohingya refugees on our land," said a member of the committee.

The committee members demanded that the government solve the Rohingya problem and gave a deadline of April 30 to the government or else they will start demonstrations.

According to a local journalist Hamidul Haque of Ukhiya, Rohingya people are going abroad in their own interest. Over 400,000 Rohingya people live along the border area.

A Rohingya Refugee Committee member from Kutupalong makeshift camp said, "We are afraid of arrests, if RRC Committee members start demonstrations again against Rohingya people. We can't go outside the camp to work. It will be very harmful for us."

Many unregistered refugees are facing starvation in the Kutupalong makeshift camp since January 2010 and many have died of hunger, he said.

Aid agencies in Bangladesh have warned that thousands of unregistered Burmese refugees are facing starvation because of the government's move to drive them out of the country. The refugees, from a Burmese minority community called Rohingya, complain that they are the victims of a crackdown and that hundreds have been arrested and forced back over the border against their will, according to the BBC's Mark Dummett's report from south-east Bangladesh near the Burmese border.

Foreign secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quaye told journalists at press briefing that Bangladesh has rejected the regional coordinator of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees recently suggested that the government should initiate such new registration for Burmese nationals living outside designated camp in Cox's Bazar on April 10.

"We have categorically informed him (the regional coordinator) that this is not possible. We do not want to discuss about the rest of the Myanmar nationals living elsewhere in Bangladesh illegally. They must go back to their homeland," said the secretary, Quaye told reporters at a press briefing at the foreign ministry.

He said Bangladesh was ready to work with the United Nations on giving access and protection to 28,000 Rohingya refugees in two camps-the Nowapara and Kutupalong.

The secretary's comment comes in the wake of a campaign in the international media about alleged repression of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Some western diplomats and legislators recently visited Cox's Bazar to witness the poor living conditions of the Rohingya people. The government has much international pressure to recognise thousands of illegal Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh as refugees. But Dhaka has been resisting that pressure saying that such a move would open a floodgate of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar's Rakhain (Arakan state).

Quaye, therefore criticised some international NGOs and media for presenting "untrue" stories about the Rohingya refugees. "We have not dumped them in concentration camps." "But that is not due to our weakness."

Recognition as refugees would thus entail a government obligation to provide them shelter, protection, food, health services and other needs.

The local administration in Cox's Bazar says that most of the repatriated Rohingya have re-entered Bangladesh illegally due to a lack of system which oppressed them to leave from their homeland.

Opinion / Analysis

[Despite Often Being Messy, Asean Family is Important - By Ernest Z Bower](#)

Jakarta Globe – 18 April 2010

Asean is like a big family and, like all families, it has issues. When you set a table for 11, in this case, the 10 leaders of the member countries — Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — plus the Asean secretary general, you are bound to have some drama. That was certainly the case in the most recent Asean summit in Hanoi.

The key message from the summit in Hanoi is that no one can forget that Asean is made up of 10 countries and each has its own problems. But the group is vitally important to its members and to international partners.

Although Vietnam, one of the most forthright advocates for a strong Asean, did a remarkable job in organizing the summit in terms of logistics, the gathering was characteristically messy. Thailand's prime

minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, didn't show up — he has thousands of protesters in the streets of Bangkok urging him to dissolve his government and seek a new electoral mandate; the Philippines' lame-duck president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, almost went home early but then changed her mind and decided to stay; Burma's Gen. Thein Sein was the primary object of the "family's" attention, receiving very strong encouragement to create real political space in upcoming elections. These examples are the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Cambodia's leader, Hun Sen, has publicly criticized the Thai secretary general for not being able to represent the collective membership — no surprise given Thai-Cambodian tensions. The dynamic is, well, dynamic.

So the question is whether this family delivers any real value to its collective members and to the global community. The answer is overwhelmingly yes. Many analysts criticize Asean on its effectiveness. Indeed, Singapore's prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, pilloried the organization for not acting decisively enough, but the truth is, Asean is a family that means something to its members and to the world's major powers.

While Burma and Thai protests predictably stole headlines in Hanoi, Asean quietly is making real progress on integrating its 10 countries, 620 million denizens and \$1.3 trillion economy. The blueprint for integration is the Asean Charter, which lays out goals for economic, sociocultural and security/political integration by 2015.

On the economic and financial front, Asean has effectively established its Asean Free Trade Area. Over 95 percent of goods move between Asean countries without tariffs. Intra-Asean trade has moved from secondary to become the largest market for the region's members in the last decade. Finance ministers of Asean and the +3 nations — China, Japan and South Korea — have initiated the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization, which creates a useful \$120 billion currency swap and crisis management facility for regional economies. Customs harmonization and financial services liberalization are also making serious gains.

The Asean Defense Ministers Meeting will take place in May in Vietnam. What had once been a quiet meeting of military chiefs of staff has now been elevated to the ministerial level and is considering whether to invite regional players, including big East Asian nations, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

An Asean dispute resolution mechanism and human rights body have also been established and while these are nascent institutions, they are significant early steps in the right direction.

The United States would be unwise to join cynical voices criticizing their effectiveness. The harder but effective policy course is to get engaged and invest in strengthening these institutions, participate at senior levels in Asean integration efforts and follow through on significant US interests in Southeast Asia. The US stake in the region is notoriously underreported. This includes investment three times as large as in China, to a pair of treaty allies (the Philippines and Thailand), to some of the world's most important shipping lanes, to key partners in counterterrorism efforts, to vital links to humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and climate change mitigation.

Asean is a family — and a messy one at that — but it is vitally important to its members and neighbors. It is likely to play a central role in any Asian regional architecture from trade and economics to security and defense. Having a strong foundation in Asean is also key to the long-term management of relations with major global partners China and India. Asean's path won't be linear. It will be colored by drama that will test even the most well-grounded strategy, but the United States has keen interests in close relations with Asean. America is a friend of this family and helping Asean be strong is an investment in its national interests.

Ernest Z Bower is a senior adviser and director of the South e a st Asia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington . This article was first published by CSIS.

East Asia Forum

[Is drug policy a human rights abuser? - By Joseph Allchin](#)

DVB - 19 April 2010

In Latin America, washed along by the flow of blood, a feeling that the 'war on drugs' may have been lost has stirred, and has caused a reassessment of prohibition, a policy that a new report claims "is driven by moralism rather than empirical research".

'Narcophobia: drugs prohibition and the generation of human rights abuses', authored by Dick Hobbs from the UK's London School of Economics (LSE) and Brazilian journalist Fernanda Mena, further states that drug "prohibition enforcement has hindered the advancement of democracy and led to violence and increases in human rights abuses".

The report attempts to demonstrate that there are global implications for drug laws as this huge global industry has devastating effects on poor producer nations, such as Burma.

Burma is the second largest producer and exporter of heroin in the world after Afghanistan. Coupled with this, the country has witnessed a dramatic increase in the production, export and consumption of methamphetamine. Australia-based Burma expert Desmond Ball estimated that the trade could account for as much as 50 percent of the country's foreign currency earnings; needless to say little of this finds its way towards developing the country.

In growing and producing these two valuable, addictive commodities, Burma is in the grip of a drugs war that despite efforts by numerous countries and international bodies sees no sign of abating. In fact, it is arguably Burma's most robust industry, with farm gate prices of opium rising at around 15 percent year on year.

Prohibition, meanwhile, has occurred on an international scale ever since the 1909 Shanghai conference at which global leaders, lead by the West, instigated the approach. But, Mena tells DVB, "the idea of banning drugs from the contemporary world is a utopia that was raised one century ago based on moral and commercial grounds much more than on evidences that it was wrecking societies".

In the intervening century drug use and abuse has sky-rocketed globally. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [estimates](#) that the prevalence of opiate addiction in Burma's northern Shan and Kachin states rose by 47 percent between 2007 and 2008.

The award-winning British investigative journalist, Nick Davies, [noted](#) in the Guardian newspaper that: "In the case of heroin, all of the side effects which are associated with the drug – all of the disease and death and misery and depravity – are the effects not of the drug itself but of the black market on which the government insists that it is sold".

All this has gone on in juxtaposition to intelligence agencies and militaries using the vast profits that the black market can make to fund causes, most often in poor producer nations, such as the Burma-based Chinese Nationalists or Kuomintang (KMT) forces that the US armed to fight the Mao government.

US scholar Alfred McCoy notes in his groundbreaking work 'The Politics of Heroin in South East Asia' that: "American involvement had gone far beyond coincidental complicity; embassies had covered up involvement by client governments, CIA contract airlines had carried opium, and individual CIA agents had winked at the opium traffic. As an indirect consequence of American involvement in the Golden Triangle until 1972, opium production steadily increased....Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle grew 70 percent of the world's illicit opium".

Despite such nefarious interventions the mainstream actions of prohibition, arrests, seizures and other police initiatives have led to an inflated global commodity price. This in turn causes places with less-than-desirable law and order situations to become primed for the production of commodities such as heroin. "In any market, if a demand exists, it will find a way to fulfil it. It will corrupt (especially because products in a black market have their value increased by the risks of the business)," says Mena.

The more that is spent policing or 'fighting' a commodity, the more the value will increase, and in turn, greater numbers of people will be robbed or new addicts inducted to pay for a habit. Indeed, the more money that exported heroin can make a junta crony or warlord in Burma, for example, the more money that a criminal has in order to control their society in rural Burma.

These industries in places such as Burma then start to dominate. With no recourse to accountability or laws, a rough justice develops which can be witnessed in the cocaine blood bath on the Mexico-US border or the warlords controlling the heroin and 'yaba' (methamphetamine) trade in the Golden Triangle,

not to mention the decades of feuding that northern Burma has witnessed and the human cost that has come with it.

Meanwhile, global efforts to stem the 'shock' seen in the media become a priority, a 'moral' crusade, epitomised by successive US president's declaring a 'war on drugs' with seemingly endless financial war chests, and telling producer nations to do everything possible to 'fight' these commodities.

"When you read the treaties on drugs eradication, it does not mention human rights, [which allows] states to take whatever measures they see fit to try to get closer to the 'utopian' objective of eliminating drugs production, trade and consumption from their territory," says Mena. "That's why we've already had crops eradicated by poison sprays (which have poisoned the local population as well); that's why we've had summary executions of people suspected of being involved in drug trafficking; that's why militarization of the war on drugs is not only legitimatised but also requested in order to try to achieve a very unlikely objective, condemning whole societies to live in such an environment in which there is an ongoing war between different drug factions and between them and the police/military forces."

In their paper Mena and Hobbs compare UN prohibition treaties and the UN's fundamental charter, and state that "it could be argued that those 'unintended and unexpected' consequences [of the war on drugs and 'doing whatever it takes'] entail breaches of fundamental human rights (namely articles 3, 5, 13 paragraph 1, and article 28 [of the UN Charter). Death (art.3), torture (art.5) and displacement forced by guerrilla warfare (art. 13 paragraph 1) all seem to be generated, in one way or another, by the black market nature of current global and local drug flows."

Spending only \$US1.25 per person each year on both health and education, it is clear that the Burmese junta has little will to improve living standards of those most vulnerable to the ravages of the industry, while the resources to educate and treat people appear not to exist in government coffers.

Ironically, \$US1.25 is roughly the same amount that a jade miner in Kachin state earns each day, and the cost of single syringe of heroin, according to shocking reports from the [Kachin News Group](#). But the question remains as to how can the harms associated with narcotics and the black market in poor, producer nations be minimised?

Portugal provides an effective model of how decriminalisation in a more developed country can be effective. After a surge in heroin use in the 1990s the Portuguese government decriminalised possession of all narcotics for personal use. Hobbs and Mena note that following decriminalisation, "The number of newly reported cases of HIV/AIDS among drug users also decreased significantly, along with drug-related mortality, and decriminalization freed up resources that were channelled into treatment and other harm reduction programs".

But in Burma the years of global prohibition and absence of law, education and healthcare create substantially more difficult questions, while the resources simply do not exist at the moment to educate young people and treat addicts. Prohibition not only supports war and violence but denies a livelihood to hundreds of thousands of families who are supported by the narcotics industry. According to the UNODC, more than 800,000 people are employed in growing opium poppy alone in Burma.

In many countries taxing such a lucrative industry would seem like a logical step. In Burma this probably already happens to an extent already, and predictably those resources merely go as far as the wallet of the local generals or authorities to be spent supplementing their own incomes. The issue then is really how can the global community aid producer nations like Burma to minimise the harm that is and has been sewn by prohibition, which according to Hobbs and Mena is detrimental to human rights and the search for democracy.

Could some of the billions of dollars that are spent every year chasing marijuana-smoking teenagers around parks in affluent nations be spent on health and education in producer nations? Could those commodities be taxed in affluent nations to be spent similarly on giving people in countries like Burma the chance to look beyond the narco-economy and to give their societies a glimmer of civility that may improve policy, governance, law and order?

If commodities such as heroin were decriminalised to the extent that addicts were given their 'hit' on prescription by doctors in safe environments, then the impact these commodities have on affluent consumer nations would be minimised as the experiences of Holland and Switzerland demonstrate. Here,

addict populations are ageing as new addicts are no longer recruited, but globally commodity prices would most likely come down. This in turn would lessen revenues that drug producers in countries like Burma would make.

So in these nations what could agencies like the UNODC do to aid this process? In countries like Afghanistan patients suffer needlessly in the shadow of vast poppy fields because the price of medical morphine is prohibitively expensive. Could the UNODC, instead of using satellite imagery to count poppy fields, set up co-operatives to produce medical morphine? The farm gate price of opiates is a far cry from the prices that are paid by junkies on the streets of London, so the UNODC or World Health Organisation (WHO) could probably offer more to Burmese farmers than drug dealers do, and still have a viable business.

If they offered an extra dollar on a kilo, for example, using models and principles of the fair trade movement, existing farmers could have a better livelihood, whilst alternative crop schemes are also still active and criminal middle-men could be bypassed. Their produce could be used to produce medical grade morphine to be prescribed to those suffering needlessly in the Third World or to be given safely to addicts in clinical surroundings, taking the substance out of the back alley and into clinics.

There is no quick cure. Violence has proved to be like an addictive drug: it helps no one but spirals out of control for virtually everyone involved. Actions like the one above, if taken in all developed nations, would have positive effects on a nation like Burma as prices came down, but not overnight. A moralistic position on 'drugs' – the simple equation that one thinks a substance evil – incorrectly suggests that one can simply fight it and it will go away. A more complex approach is needed – a development paradigm needs to take prohibition out of the schoolyard think tank and into the harshness of reality.

16/04/2010

News

[Nine die in Rangoon bombings](#)

DVB - 15 April 2010

Three separate blasts have hit Rangoon during the annual water festival, killing at least nine and injuring 75.

The blasts occurred near to Kandawgyi Lake, where hundreds of people were celebrating the festival, known in Burmese as Thingyan. State media in Burma announced the incident but unusually did not point the blame at anyone. Past blasts have often been attributed to ethnic opposition armies.

"We have seen at least 50 wounded people taken to hospital and nine people died," a witness at Rangoon General Hospital told Reuters, although subsequent reports have said that 75 were wounded.

Three loud explosions were heard at a pavilion near to the lake – most of the pavilions on U Htaungbo Road alongside the lake are run by companies close to the authorities.

"Some people were wounded but we are not in a position to give you further detailed information since necessary investigations are still in progress," police told Reuters.

[Casualties rise to 178 in Myanmar water festival bomb blasts](#)

Xinhua – 16 April 2010

YANGON -- A total of 170 people were injured in a series of three bomb blasts in Myanmar's third day water festival activities in Yangon on Thursday afternoon, up from 94, while the death toll remained at eight, Friday's official daily New Light of Myanmar reported.

Among the injured 125 are men, 45 are women, and among the dead, five are male, three are female, the report confirmed.

The report described such terrorist attacks in the water festival as being "merely intended to tarnish Myanmar traditional culture and insult the public."

The authorities warned revelers in various regions across the country including the new capital of Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay to remain vigilant against potential atrocities to help expose terrorists.

The daily condemned in an article the terrorist attacks, saying that "attacking those participating in the traditional Thingyan happily and peacefully with the bombs is an insult to the people. It is an inhuman act. Because of such subversive acts, we the people abhor and loath the terrorist insurgents."

The article warned that "terrorist insurgents usually hide themselves in disguise among the people. We cannot identify the terrorists easily. This is why they are brazenly committing subversive acts by sliding into the crowds of ordinary people in disguise".

The three bomb explosions occurred in front of a water throwing pandal, named X-2-O, on Mingala Taung Nyunt township's Kandawkyi Ring Road at the Kandawkyi lake park area at about 3 p.m. (local time).

Hundreds of thousands of revelers were overjoyed in water throwing when the blast went off.

The blasts caused panic among the revelers then, while the injured were rushed to nearby hospitals for treatment, especially the biggest Yangon General Hospital which was packed with relatives of the victims.

The scene was at once sealed off by the police to clear the crowds to pave way for ambulances to carry the dead and the injured to the hospitals.

Despite the case, revelers outside the scene continued water throwing with traffic jammed in other part of the area.

The situation, after the incident, remained calm through to the night on Thursday.

[US sympathizes with Burma bomb blast victims](#)

Mizzima - 16 April 2010

By Mungpi

The United States has expressed concern and sympathy over the serial bomb blasts that killed at least eight and injured over 90 in Rangoon on Thursday. It condemned the perpetrators of the heinous act.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to those who were the victims of this bombing," Philip J. Crowley, Assistant Secretary of the State Department, told a regular press briefing on Thursday.

With the Burmese in a festive mood celebrating the annual water festival marking the New Year, three bombs exploded in quick succession on Thursday afternoon in Rangoon, the country's former capital, killing at least five men and three woman and seriously injuring over 90 people.

The blast occurred at a Pandal, built for the water festival, in Minglar Taungnyunt Township.

Though bomb blasts in Burma, particularly in Rangoon, are not uncommon, it has not injured so many in the past, though there have been a few deaths. However, those killed on Thursday's blast included a municipal officer, and Chairman of the Minglar Taungnyunt Township Peace and Development council (TPDC) injured.

"We condemn any kind of violence that victimizes innocent civilians... obviously, we'll be waiting to see what the results of the investigation are," Crowley said.

So far, no group or groups have claimed responsibility for the blasts and police in Rangoon said they are conducting widespread investigations.

The junta, which in the past has blacked out such news, on Thursday, was quick in announcing news of the explosions.

Water Festival, which marks the Burmese New Year, is the biggest festival of the country and is widely celebrated by thousands of people, mostly youths, splashing water on the streets.

The US has maintained sporadic diplomatic relations that include rare meetings and talks with the military leaders of Burma since the Obama administration announced a policy change in 2009.

BURMA: Elections without rights

Statement by Asian Human Rights Commission – 15 April 2010

The government of Burma has set down conditions for the forming of political parties that would have people associate in order to participate in anticipated elections, but nowhere is the right to associate guaranteed. While parties are required to have at least a thousand members to enlist for the national election--500 for regional assemblies--a host of extant security laws circumscribe how, when and in what numbers persons can associate.

The allowance of association without the right to associate is manifest in the Political Parties Registration Law 2010, which contains references to some preexisting laws that prohibit free association. According to section 12, as translated by the Asian Human Rights Commission,

"A party that infringes [the law in the manner of] any of the following will cease to have authorization to be a political party: ... (3) Direct or indirect communication with, or support for, armed insurgent organisations and individuals opposing the state; or organisations and individuals that the state has designated as having committed terrorist acts; or associations that have been declared unlawful; or these organisations' members."

As in present-day Burma--or Myanmar as it is now officially known--anybody can be found guilty of having supported insurgents, of having been involved in terrorist acts, and above all, of having contacted unlawful associations, the law effectively allows the authorities to de-register any political party at any time.

The case of U Myint Aye is indicative. For founding a local group of human rights defenders and speaking on overseas radio broadcasts about what he saw after Cyclone Nargis, Myint Aye was arrested and accused of a fabricated bombing plot. The military tried and convicted him and two other accused in a press conference during September 2008; in November a court followed suit, handing down a sentence of life imprisonment ([AHRC-UAU-018-2009](#)).

More recently, the AHRC has issued appeals on evidence-free cases in which people have been tried and convicted to long terms of imprisonment for having allegedly had contact with unlawful groups outside the country. These include the case of Dr. Wint Thu and eight others in Mandalay ([AHRC-UAC-011-2010](#)), and the case of Myint Myint San and two others in Rangoon who were convicted for allegedly receiving money from abroad that was for the welfare of families with imprisoned relatives ([AHRC-UAC-137-2009](#)).

The new party registration law is hostile to democratic government because it envisages the arbitrary use of draconian provisions to prevent people from associating freely. It is a law to ensure that only persons and parties palatable to the military regime will be able to run for and obtain office.

But it also points to a far deeper problem. The very concept of a right, in terms of international standards, is neither recognized nor understood by the government of Burma. That the right to associate does not exist is not merely a consequence of a law designed to deny it. It is a consequence of a political and legal regime that does not contain rights within its conceptual framework at all.

This was not always the case. In 1950s Burma, rights were a central part of how national leaders sought to shape government and society. The courts also strongly supported citizens' rights against the state through a robust constitutional framework. But after the military took full power in a second coup, during 1962, rights became "socialist".

According to this notion of rights, the interests of the people and the state were aligned against the capitalists. Under "socialist rights" the very idea that a citizen might have a right to claim against the state was absurd. Individual agents of the state could violate citizens' rights, but the state itself could never do wrong. The right to associate in this time was therefore always a "right" to associate with and through the organs of the state, not apart from them.

After 1988 the socialist concept of rights also ceased to exist, but it was not replaced with anything else. The new state in Burma was right-less, constitution-less, and also law-less in the sense that all laws in the last two decades have been issued as executive decrees rather than through any legislative process. Anything described as a right in this time has in the official view been no more than an entitlement bestowed upon all or part of the population, even if it may be described otherwise.

The 2008 Constitution has confirmed the absence of rights from the normative frame of the new state. At every point it negates and qualifies so-called statements of rights, including the right to associate. Under section 354, citizens have a "right" to form associations that do not contravene statutory law on national security and public morality: which as shown above can be construed to mean literally anything.

The military regime in Burma evidently expects the new constitution and new elections together to be taken as indicators of social and political change. But the passing of a constitution does not signify that rights exist, and nor does the holding of elections signify democratic renewal.

After 52 years of almost unbroken army rule, Burma is today not only without a judiciary, but also without the conceptual frame of rights that are requisite for a fair electoral process. Lacking these, what remains can only be characterized as the politics of despair.

[This is the second in a series of statements by the AHRC on the planned general elections in Burma. The first was, "Elections without a judiciary?"([AHRC-STM-059-2010](#)). Next: "Elections without speech?"]

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About AHRC: *The Asian Human Rights Commission is a regional non-governmental organisation monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984.*

[Election 2010: Mon Democracy Party Prepares For Registration](#)

Kaowao - 14 April 2010

By Siha Ong, Kaowao

Sangkhlaburi -- Mon activists and politicians are preparing to register their political party for the upcoming election, according to local sources in Moulmein. Following the announcement of the SPDC's party registration laws; the activists, eager to participate in the general election, banded together to form the 'All Regions' Mon Democracy Party.'

The newly formed group is led by Nai Janu Mon (aka) Nai Ngwe Thein, a well-known song writer and retired State Education Administrator.

According to Dr. Banya Aung Moe, the ARMDP was created as another option for those wishing to take part in the election in opposition to the 'Mon Working Committee' which has decided to boycott the 2010 general election.

"We understand the position of the MNDF and NMSP who have boycotted the election, but we feel we should take part in the election so we can represent the civilians in the Mon region as well as the other ethnic groups who live in the Mon area. We will register after the Songkrant New Year Festival, but the 15 member grouping is now working on our party platform," said Dr. Banya in a telephone interview.

After a divisive meeting on March 30, which decided to boycott the election after the election laws were posted, members from the Mon Working Committee who wanted to take part in the election immediately recruited new leaders for a new party. The party leaders include Nai Janu Mon, Nai Saik, Dr. Min Hla Aung, Dr. Min Nwe Soe, Dr. Banya Aung Moe, Min San Tin and Nai Lawee Ong (retired colonel of New Mon State Party).

"Many expressed a willingness to support the new Mon party and want a chance to discuss their issues rather than standing on the sidelines during the election," said Dr. Banya who is a veteran of the New Mon State Party and Mon community leader at the Three Pagodas Pass border town.

The original 15 member Mon Working Committee was formed to prepare for the upcoming 2010 election during a gathering of the ceasefire agreement celebration hosted by the NMSP in June 2009. The committee is comprised of NMSP veterans, the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) members, and

retired civil servants. However, the Mon Working Committee had decided not to take part in the upcoming election after the election laws were released.

The two main political parties, the MNDF and NMSP have repeatedly stated that they will not participate in the 2010 election.

15/04/2010

News

[US warns Myanmar junta dialogue may be reviewed](#)

AFP – 14 April 2010

WASHINGTON — The United States on Wednesday warned Myanmar's military generals that it could review its dialogue with them in the absence of democratic reforms.

Washington has also conveyed concerns directly to the junta over its decision to hold elections that effectively barred key opposition leaders, an official said.

"I think it will be fair to say in terms of the election law and our desire to see an internal dialogue between the various stakeholders about the upcoming election that we are disappointed in the steps that had been taken," said US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs Kurt Campbell.

"We have conveyed (this) directly to the regime and also to the countries that encouraged us to begin a dialogue with the country," he said in reply to a question at a forum on US-Malaysia relations held at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

"We do think we have been able to pass some consequential messages but overall, I would say that we are going to need to see some steps on the part of the leadership in (Myanmar) to sustain this process going forward."

Elections in Myanmar, expected to be held by early November, have been widely criticised as lacking credibility because of laws that effectively bar opposition leader and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part.

They will be the country's first elections for two decades, but Suu Kyi's political party has called a boycott over rules that would have forced it to expel her as leader if it wanted to participate.

The Obama administration, which has made a signature policy of engaging US adversaries, last year initiated a dialogue with the junta, judging that a previous approach of isolating the regime had not borne fruit.

Asked to comment on the US position on sanctions against Myanmar, Campbell said, "I would say we have obviously not eased sanctions and we always retain the right and the ability (to maintain them)."

US lawmakers are pushing the Obama administration to review its policy of dialogue with the junta and tighten sanctions to persuade the generals not to hold the elections, which rights groups call a sham.

Nine US senators across the political spectrum in a recent letter to Obama urged the Treasury Department to act on a law that would crack down on US bank accounts linked to Myanmar's leaders and target foreign banks that do business with the junta.

[World activists demand release of Suu Kyi](#)

Jakarta Post – 15 April 2010

By Lilian Budianto

Hundreds of participants in the World Movement for Democracy (WMD) symposium in Jakarta have signed a petition calling for the release of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi and a fair trial for Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim.

Kim Campbell, a member of the steering committee of the WMD and former prime minister of Canada said, the issue of progress towards democracy in Malaysia and Myanmar had loomed over the symposium that brought together 600 activists from around 110 countries.

Former deputy prime minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim, who also addressed the WMD in Jakarta, has been facing a trial over accusations of sexual harassment against an aide. Meanwhile, Myanmar is likely to see no change in its upcoming elections as the opposition leader Suu Kyi has been barred from running from office under new poll regulations.

“We call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and a fair trial for Anwar Ibrahim. The petition will be presented to the ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan,” said Campbell.

Democracy in Southeast Asia has hogged the spotlight in the WMD 6th symposium as human rights activists have been sharing information on the latest situations in their home countries. Besides Malaysia and Myanmar, recent bloody uprising in Thailand has also grabbed attention with much sympathy for the embattled Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Protests in Thailand have claimed the lives of over 20 people, including a journalist and soldiers.

Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, said the Thai government had a reputation for non-violence and the recent death toll had hinted at the scale of the urgency forcing the government to take action.

Khin Maung Win, deputy director for the Democratic Voice of Burma, said the Thai crisis was the fault of ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who has financed protests.

The WMD also presented honors to four worldwide democracy activists on Wednesday for their efforts to advance freedom and democracy amid government crack-downs.

Iran’s Mahnaz Afkhami, Russia’s Dokka Itslaev, Venezuela’s Roberto Patino and Syria’s Radwan Ziadeh will receive the John Boyce Hurford honor. Hurford was a philanthropist who helped form WMD.

Mahnaz was a lecturer in literature before becoming involved in the women’s movement, which has put her life under constant threat. Mahnaz has been involved in the “One Million Signatures Campaign” to end gender inequality in Iran.

Mahnaz said, “the campaign aimed at collecting one million signatures in support of granting women equal legal status as men”. At present, men have the sole right to divorce and except in special cases, the right to custody of children. “

Dokka Itslaev from Russia’s Memorial Chechnya has been working on promoting human rights in the North Caucasus, which has been under close government control over a local insurgency. “The government has continued to clamp down on journalists and freedom movement activists,” said Dokka. Dokka pointed to the death of one Memorial Chechnya activist, Natalia Estermirova, last year.

Roberto Patino from Venezuela is a student movement leader in the Caracas’s Student Federation of Simon Bolivar University. The 21 year old student of manufacturing engineering has been involved in the student freedom movement since he was 17 and the peace movement.

Radwan Ziadeh from Syria has been living in exile in the US for years since the government blacklisted him for his vocal opposition to injustice.

[Suu Kyi back home after heart check-up](#)

Asian Tribune - 14 April 2010

By R. Vasudevan

New Delhi, Detained Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was taken briefly to a hospital for a heart checkup, a government official said in Yangon.

No other details of her condition were available, but hospital staff said they saw Suu Kyi walk in and walk out on her own. The 64-year-old Nobel Peace laureate was not known to have had a heart condition, and it was not clear what prompted the apparently unscheduled checkup.

The government official said Suu Kyi was taken from her lakeside home around 9 p.m. to the Yangon General Hospital. She was sent back home about 20 minutes later. The diminutive, 100-pound (45-kilogram) Suu Kyi has been in frail health for years. She suffered from dehydration and low blood pressure last year.

Her personal physician, Dr. Tin Myo Win, visited her April 1 for a monthly routine medical checkup and again last Thursday with two other doctors to conduct an ultrasound examination. Nyan Win, Suu Kyi's lawyer and party spokesman, said he was unaware of her health condition. Suu Kyi has spent 14 of the last 20 years in jail or under house arrest.

Burmese Army extorts money from opium growers

KNG - 14 April 2010

Burmese Army battalions have been extorting sums of money from opium growers in Sadung region in east Kachin State, northern Burma while ostensibly on an opium eradication mission, said Sadung sources.

Sadung happens to be the largest opium-producing region in Kachin State. There was a joint opium elimination operation by Burma's ruling junta and the Kachin Independence Organization in February and March.

Now, both the operation and the opium harvesting season are over. Yet Burmese troops near Lajawng village near the border town Kambaiti have stayed put and are demanding money from the opium field owners, said Lajawng villagers.

According to Lajawng villagers, two Burmese Army battalions in Waingmaw township--- Waingmaw-based Infantry Battalion No. 58 and Shwe Nyaung Pyin-based Light Infantry Battalion No. 321 are now demanding 50,000 Kyat (US\$51) for each opium field in Lajawng area.

Earlier, Burmese troops into the opium eradication operation in Lajawng areas demanded money from growers instead of uprooting opium, said Lajawng villagers.

A KIO officer told Kachin News Group, in the latest joint opium eradication operation they destroyed some opium fields along the major roads and demanded opium tax from other field owners.

Burmese Army sources said troops made money during the two-month opium eradication programme in Sadung region.

On December 14, last year, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that opium cultivation in Burma rose in the third straight year, and Kachin and Wa bought weapons from the sale of drugs to prepare to take on the Burmese Army in the event of civil war.

The agency report was rejected by the KIO and United Wa State Army (UWSA), which have refused to toe the junta's line on the Border Guard Force issue.

China and Burma restrict cross border travel

KNG - 15 April 2010

The thorny Border Guard Force issue is creating fresh complications with China and Burma having restricted cross border travel in Kachin State in northern Burma as of early this month, said local sources.

Burmese border officials based in Laja Yang village in Waingmaw Township in Kachin State of a sudden scaled down issuing border pass books also called the Red Book to Chinese workers and businessmen, said Laja Yang's villagers.

"Over the last two weeks the junta has scaled down issuing numbers of Red Books to the Chinese from the earlier limitless numbers. Now only about 20 persons per day get the pass," said a resident of Laiza, the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) on the border, near Laja Yang.

The idea behind the clamp down is to limit the number of Chinese wanting to cross the border and tighter control of the border gate. It is also to pressurize the KIO to accept the junta-proposed Border Guard Force, said border traders.

Chinese border officials have followed suit and also stopped issuing new Red Books, to Burmese citizens since early this month, said border travelers.

The Chinese Red Book was issued at the border checkpoint and Burmese permit holders were allowed to travel and live in the limited areas in China's southwest Yunnan province for up to one year, said border travelers in Laiza.

Residents in KIO headquarters in Laiza said China has also restricted cross-border Burmese travelers to its territory even as military tension mounts between the junta and KIO on the BGF issue.

The junta has set April 28 as the second deadline for KIO not to hedge and come clean on the BGF after negotiation failed over 13 meetings in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

Tomorrow, the KIO is going to explain to Kachin people in Laiza in a public meeting why the negotiations with the junta failed.

Burmese music: Sound of the underground

The Independent - 14 April 2010

When the junta banned traditional protest songs, its leading exponents chose a life of exile rather than fall silent. Andrew Buncombe meets them in Delhi

First comes the sound of hand drums, followed by a voice that is steady and persistent. As Ngwe Toe leans back and angles his words towards the microphone, his lines are met by a chanting group which takes up his theme and sings back at him, as a call and response.

"The religion in our country," sings Toe, as the group answers for him, "is Theravada Buddhism". The activist continues: "The colour saffron is growing everywhere."

The group responds: "The monks are very graceful, but now their power has been drained. They are hiding in the remote areas."

As the drums continue in a dreamy loop, Toe implores: "Tell me why." The chanters tell him: "The military devil is rising up."

This is a traditional Burmese protest song with a modern twist. For generations, the people of Burma marked their new year by performing Thangyat – songs and skits that gave voice to local grievances.

In 1988, the year in which the military authorities violently crushed a series of democracy demonstrations with the death of at least 3,000 people, the junta decided it had endured enough protest and banned the tradition, threatening jail for anyone who dared to disobey.

But the generals could not stop Thangyat, merely drive it overseas. Now, communities of exiled Burmese around the world put together their own collections of protest songs, which are sold on CDs and even broadcast back into Burma where residents listen secretly on their radios.

One of the most famous and popular groups, of which Ngwe Toe is a member, is based in the west of Delhi. Ahead of the traditional four-day new year celebrations, or water festival, which begins today, the activists recorded and released a new collection of songs, music and poetry entitled Gaining Victory for Us and Defeat for Them.

"During the festival, it is a tradition that if there is something the people do not like, it will be criticised – be it politics, social affairs or food," said Zin Naing, who escaped to India from Burma after the 1988 uprising and who helped produce the recording.

"Now, inside Burma, Thangyat is not allowed, so ours has become one of the only ones that people can get. We produce it on CD as well as cassettes, which are smuggled into Burma."

There are an estimated 6,000 Burmese exiles in Delhi, most of them from Chin state, on India's north-eastern border. Many of them took part in the 1988 uprisings and came to India, which at the time was critical of the military authorities and welcomed the refugees. Most have never dared to even visit their home country since.

Ngwe Toe, the 40-year-old lead singer, fled when he was just 19, leaving behind all his relatives. His father died in 2003, but he dreams of returning to the country with his wife and young son, and of being able to show his child to his mother.

In the meantime, he takes some measure of comfort from imagining his family furtively listening to the songs of protest that he and his friends have recorded. "It's like a rap," he said. "I say the first line and then the others respond with the second. It's a call and response, and when I am singing, I am shouting these slogans with emotion. I am very focused on the song. I would be happy if my mother hears it, and would then be able to give the message that her son is involved in the politics."

The lyrics for the song performed by Ngwe Toe were written by a Buddhist monk, forced to escape to India after taking part in the so-called Saffron Revolution of September 2007, when tens of thousands of monks and citizens took to the streets of Rangoon and other major cities, demanding democratic reforms.

The monk, U Dhamma, a smiling, round-faced 23-year-old, fled after he and several other monks from his monastery joined the demonstrations in the northern city of Mandalay. "I took part in the marches. I thought there would be a revolution. I believed in democratic rule for Burma," said the monk, who crossed into north-eastern India in January 2008 and now lives in the same dusty Delhi neighbourhood as many other exiles. "After the marches, I stayed at the monastery for some months, but then a minister came to give food. We were very angry and refused to accept this. The minister put pressure on the abbot to expel us, and the next day our names were put in the newspaper, saying that we were to be expelled. We had no chance to stay in Burma."

Those who wrote the collection of protest songs have had no shortage of material to inspire them over the past 12 months. Last year, the junta extended the house arrest of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for 18 months, after she was convicted of breaching the terms of her detention when an uninvited US tourist swam to her lakeside home.

Then, last month, the regime announced new rules governing the controversial election due to be held later this year. The rules effectively bar Ms Suu Kyi from standing and say that her party, the National League for Democracy, (NLD), would have to oust her if it wished to field candidates. The NLD has announced it is boycotting the election.

It is not just the junta that comes in for criticism in the Thangyat. While the songs indeed condemn the regime's alleged nuclear ambitions, the election and the country's poverty, the NLD and even politicians in exile are also subjects of satire.

Such humour has long been a tradition of subtle dissent in Burma. One of the country's best-known comics, Zarganar, spent many years making barbed puns about the regime. Eventually, in 2008, the junta ran out of patience with him and seized on an interview he had given to the BBC criticising the authorities' response of the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. He was jailed for 59 years, a sentence reduced to 35 on appeal.

Likewise, in Mandalay, members of a famous comic troupe known as the Moustache Brothers have been in and out of jail as a result of their performances making fun of the junta.

The Burmese exiles who put together the protest album remain confident that change can come. The song performed by Ngwe Toe says the monks will lead the transformation.

Its last lines, sung as call-and-response, conclude: "If the monks unite – the military becomes afraid. If the monks unite – the religion will be glowing. If the monks take to the front lines – we will escape from poverty. If the monks speak the truth – they will speak to the whole world."

Opinion / Analysis

[Indonesia's 'credibility to play role' in Myanmar transition](#)

Jakarta Post – 14 April 2010

Lilian Budianto

A number of observers have suggested that initiatives to encourage Myanmar's military junta to hand over power to civilians include guaranteeing that they will not be prosecuted after stepping down. The Jakarta Post's Lilian Budianto talks about the issue with the president of Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy, Carl Gershman, currently in Jakarta for the 6th symposium of the "World Movement for Democracy". Gershman also said Indonesia could play a significant role in Myanmar's transition to democracy. Below are excerpts of the interview:

Question: Does providing guarantee that Myanmar's generals will be free from prosecution after they are not in power help lead to transition to democracy?

Answer: Yes, the generals in Myanmar want to know that they have a future after they are no longer in power.

They want some compromise. Just like in Indonesia; the military was moved out of politics but they retain some influence here.

In South Africa, (in the aftermath of apartheid system), not everybody was punished. Some people need to be punished, such as those who committed crimes against humanity.

There are different levels of crimes but it is important to limit vengeance and retribution because if you go too far, you will destabilize the democratic transition.

Former rulers will fight and so you must find the middle ground. It is hard. Human rights activists sometimes are more interested in retribution than finding the middle ground because it involves compromise. You have to find a balance.

Is it acceptable for the international community to allow perpetrators of human rights crimes to walk free?

It will need compromise and constitutional reforms factoring in how to include the minority and how much power to give to the military (after the end of dictatorship). In Chile in 1989, you had (president Augusto) Pinochet out of office but the military had some influence afterward. In Poland in 1989, some radical activists were against some guarantees that were given to communists. But compromises are sometimes necessary.

You must deal with the past, which can arise in different ways.

What role can Indonesia play in Myanmar?

Indonesia has the authority and credibility to play a role in the transition of Burma considering that it is the largest country in Southeast Asia. It is a democracy ruled by the former military general. Indonesia has the authority to enter Burma more than we do. Indonesia believes in quiet diplomacy.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is a sophisticated man. He doesn't believe in imposing the will of Indonesia on Burma. Indonesia believes in a quiet diplomacy. He can use that to encourage a change in Burma, Indochina as well. Indonesia has a role to play beyond his border. We are engaging with Indonesia to spread democracy.

The relation between Indonesia and the US is one of the most important relations we have in the world in terms of democracy development. We have difficult relations with authoritarian countries. We must look together for a change to work together in Burma. It is important for the US to work with Indonesia on Burma.

What can push change in Myanmar?

Domestic drive. International push can only provide some aid but the drive has to come from within.

But the domestic factor is too weak?

It is not that the domestic factor is too weak but the military regime is too severe.

You have thousands of people who took to the streets in 2007 for revolutions, but they were repressed. One thing that was different in Burma: In the 1988 uprising, 3,000 people were killed while in the 2007 uprising, 100 were killed. There is space for a democratic voice in Burma.

What options does it have to lead to change?

It is possible that the people, like in the Philippines, have a non-violent revolution. However, that is not possible in Burma.

Indonesia has to play a role. The Indonesian President is from the military. He can show the Burmese that it is possible to make a transition to democracy and you have to pressure them but also enable them see that there is a future. Dictators tend to be very nervous because they committed crimes and are afraid the people will seek revenge.

14/04/2010

News

[China urges reconciliation in Myanmar vote](#)

AFP - 13 April 2010

Beijing – China said Tuesday it hoped Myanmar's elections later this year would lead to national reconciliation and announced Premier Wen Jiabao would visit the country this month. "On Myanmar's election, as a friendly neighbour we hope to see national reconciliation of the various parties in the country to ensure national stability and development," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said.

Wen will visit Myanmar as part of an April 22-25 swing through Southeast Asia that will also take him to Brunei and Indonesia, she told reporters at a regular news briefing.

During his Indonesia and Myanmar stops, Wen will attend celebrations for the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations with those countries and "have extensive contact with people from different sectors," she said, without elaborating.

Elections in military-ruled Myanmar, expected to be held by early November, have been widely criticised as lacking credibility because of laws that effectively bar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part.

They will be the country's first elections for two decades, but Suu Kyi's political party has called a boycott over rules that would have forced it to expel her as leader if it wanted to participate.

China is the isolated state's sole major ally and trade partner.

Energy-hungry China is an eager buyer of Myanmar's sizeable natural gas reserves and has in the past tried to shield its ruling junta from international sanctions imposed over its poor human rights record.

During his Southeast Asian trip, Wen will meet with Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and "leaders of Myanmar," Jiang said.

[Senior Burmese Army officer threatens to eliminate KIO](#)

KNG - 13 April 2010

Increasingly frustrated with the Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO's) refusal to toe the military junta's line, a senior Burmese Army officer from capital Naypyitaw made public his ire and spoke of eliminating the rebel armed group in Bhamo, Kachin State last week. He was campaigning for the elections, said residents.

An irate Maj-Gen Lun Maung, Auditor General of the junta criticized the KIO, the last remaining Kachin armed group, which has refused to accept the junta-proposed transformation to the Border Guard Force.

He was addressing Bhamo residents in four different venues for the general elections by the year end, on Friday, said residents.

The Naypyitaw officer threatened that KIO should be dealt with like disobedient children, "Like children, we will try to convince KIO to accept the BGF through words. If it does not listen, we will beat it with our hands and if not then with a stick. If it still does not work we have to kick it".

He accused the KIO of lying and refused to believe KIO's reasons for rejecting the BGF --- that the Kachin people are not willing to transform KIO, and that the KIO has to go in for revolution backed by the desire of Kachin people.

He also said that KIO is not qualified to rule the state saying "It cannot provide leadership to a small district like Bhamo, how can it be trusted to rule the state (Kachin State)?"

Maj-Gen Lun Maung, is a Shan and has grown up in Nawng Hku Sam Pa village, about three miles west of Bhamo, also called Manmaw in Kachin. He was there till high school and moved to Burma proper.

In public meetings in Bhamo he said that there are only 20 per cent Kachins in the three major cities in Kachin State - Bhamo, Mogaung and Mohnyin, and the rest are Shan and Burmese.

On January 4, 1948, the Union of Burma was formed with the proper Burma (the areas around mainly Mandalay and Rangoon) and seven ethnic states--- Kachin, Chin, Shan, Mon, Rakhaing (Arakan), Karen and Karenni. The states populated with ethnic people encircle the proper Burma.

A civil worker, who helped to organize Maj-Gen Lun Maung's campaign said, "I thought his speech was racist and not meant for unity among races in Kachin State. It will only fuel the desire of Kachins and other races in Kachin State to oppose the ruling junta".

On April 16, the KIO is going to hold public meetings in Laiza headquarters east of Kachin State, near the China border. It will explain to the people why the series of meetings on BGF with the junta failed to get off the ground, said KIO officers in Laiza.

[Myanmar could use S. African reconciliation model activists](#)

The Jakarta Post – 13 April 2010

By Lilian Budianto

Jakarta | International sanctions and domestic pressure should be combined to push for democracy reform that will lead to reconciliation in the military-ruled Myanmar, activists at an international forum said here Monday.

With upcoming elections later this year, Myanmar is expected to fail in bringing about a political change, the forum heard. Activists worldwide have agreed that punishment and internal pressure must be maximized for Myanmar's reform to work, while at the same time looking into reconciliation between the ruling and opposition groups.

Khin Maung Win, the Oslo-based deputy director executive of the Democratic Voice of Burma, said political reform in Myanmar had not been working in the absence of synergy between those preferring engagement and those looking for more sanctions.

"I'd say we have to engage Myanmar and at the same time make sanctions an option."

Khin was speaking on a sidelines of the "World Movement for Democracy", an international symposium that runs from April 11-14, and hosts 600 activists from 110 countries around the world.

Recognizing the need for domestic factors as the main force for reform within Myanmar, Khin also said it had so far had little success.

"We have had several uprisings since the elections in 1990, but none was successful because the military were so powerful. Realistically speaking, you cannot hope the common people will rally again and expect it will eventually work without help from the outside," he said.

The US and other western countries have imposed economic sanctions on Myanmar, while Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries have opposed the sanctions, saying the economic isolation will not help to bring about change.

Rama Naidu, the executive director of the Durban-based Democracy Development Program, said the approach applied in South Africa could be adopted for Myanmar to woo the military rulers to hand over power.

South Africa survived the aftermath of the apartheid system because its truth and reconciliation commission managed to find a resolution that worked both for the oppressors and victims, he said. The commission did not bring perpetrators in the apartheid system to justice.

"We have to compromise when we come seeking a reconciliation. Each country has their own culture and accepted ways of how to deal with this ... We can use our local standard in this case. The international standard of bringing perpetrators to justice may not be the best [way to approach our circumstances]."

Carl Gershman, the president of the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy, said reconciliation should limit vengeance and retribution toward past perpetrators because this would destabilize the democratic process.

"We have to make a compromise and find a middle ground that can work for everybody. And I think the military junta will open more room for a change if they know they have some future after they are no longer in power," he said.

[Myanmar: Coping with water scarcity in the Ayeyarwaddy](#)

IRIN - 13 April 2010

PYINKAYAING - Water scarcity has become a daily challenge in Myanmar's Ayeyarwaddy Delta in the dry season, with thousands still struggling after damage to water sources by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008.

The delta's inhabitants traditionally source drinking water from rainwater harvesting, communal water ponds and tube and open wells, since most villages do not have access to piped water and nearby tidal rivers are saline.

The ponds help villagers during the dry season, which stretches from November to May, but can be insufficient.

Many ponds and wells were heavily salinated when a 3m tidal surge inundated much of the low-lying area when the cyclone struck.

Efforts to rehabilitate them are well under way. However, a 12 March forum on [Nargis recovery](#) held by the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) comprising the government, the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), heard that an estimated 180,000 people across three townships in the delta will probably see their primary water sources dry up during the dry season months of March and April.

While this is half the number of the 360,000 affected delta dwellers at risk from water shortages in 2009, agencies say more needs to be done.

"There is continued need for rehabilitation and repair of damaged water sources," Joseph Tadayo, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) emergency specialist with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Myanmar, told IRIN.

"Access to improved new water sources must be increased, in particular new ponds and wells. Water storage and treatment at household level remains inadequate, with high risk of contamination... Hygiene practices, in particular for children, are rudimentary and may lead to increased risk of diseases," he said.

Long-term problem

According to the TCG's July 2008 Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) [report](#), 43 percent of ponds in the delta were contaminated during Cyclone Nargis. Household rainwater collection systems were also badly damaged.

"The main challenge is that there is insufficient good quality water sources across the delta," said Daniel Collison, director of emergencies for Save the Children in Myanmar.

"Over 70 percent of people rely on ponds as their main means of access to water, and insufficient water sources are cited as the main reason for household water shortages, so there is an in-built long-term problem," he said.

UNICEF and other WASH sector cooperating partners have constructed and rehabilitated over 3,800 water storage ponds and more than 3,000 tube and dug wells.

But potable water is still a daily problem for 38-year-old betel seller Aye Aye Myint from Thar Yar Gone village in Pyinkayaing District, one of the hardest-hit areas in the delta.

"People in our village are always busy getting water. They are either waiting for water trucking or looking for places where we can fetch water. We can't do any other work in the dry season," said Aye Aye Myint, who receives a daily water ration of three litres from Save the Children.

"Though we receive drinking water, we don't have enough for household use. We still face difficult access to water for washing, bathing and cleaning," she said.

The third post-Nargis survey [released in February 2010](#) noted that the travel time to fetch water and return home during the 2009 dry season averaged 72 minutes. Fetching water imposes a considerable time burden, often on women and girls, it said.

Alternative sources

The contamination of ponds has seen a shift to alternative sources of water, such as rainwater tanks, water trucking provided by NGOs and open dug wells.

Since Nargis, Nay Min, a fisherman in his 40s in the village of Ma Gyi Chyaing, has moved from relying on village ponds to water trucks, which fill a communal water tank with well water.

"Many water ponds were saline after the cyclone. We have only a few water ponds left but the taste of water is not as good as before," he said.

Private water sellers are also profiting from the dry season, although a cart of water at 1,000 kyat (US\$1) - nearly a daily wage for many such as Aye Aye Myint - makes it unaffordable for many.

"In the short term, improving access and quality of ponds and wells will be an important investment, and will make a definite contribution to reducing future dry season shortages," said Save the Children's Collison.

ypi/ey/cb

Unknown Disease Spreads on Western Burma Border

Narinjara News – 13 April 2010

Maungdaw: An unknown disease has broken out and is spreading on the western Burma border, affecting many people in the area, according to local journal and residents.

A weekly eleven journal published a story related to the disease last week and referred to the illness as "Chikan Gannya", but no one knows what the disease actually is.

A housemaid from Maungdaw told Narinjara over the phone that a group of physicians from the Maungdaw general hospital visited many houses recently to investigate the disease, but she had no further details about the illness.

Narinjara called the Maungdaw hospital to inquire about the disease but the physician on the phone refused to reveal any information, saying, "A senior doctor is not in the hospital now. If you want to know of the disease, come to the hospital to ask."

According to a local source, the disease first causes a high fever, and the patient then becomes ill and his body bruised as though he was beaten by sticks. The victim can't walk and his face and legs become swollen.

A local doctor told Narinjara on the condition of anonymity that the disease is related to the flu but seems to be transmitted by mosquitoes, but he could offer no further detail.

Many people in several wards and villages in Maungdaw have fallen ill with the disease, but are unable to receive treatment at the government hospital in Maungdaw.

A daughter of one victim reported seeking treatment at a private clinic and being given some tablets and insecticides, but nothing else.

Opinion / Analysis

[The UN singles out big oil in Burma with good reason - By Matthew Smith](#)

Huffington Post – 12 April 2010

In a surprising [report](#) last month to the UN Human Rights Council, UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on human rights Tomás Quintana recommended an official "[commission of inquiry](#)" into possible crimes against humanity and war crimes in military-ruled Burma (Myanmar).

Although the call for such a commission was widely covered in [media](#) and policy circles, a critical section of the report went completely overlooked and unreported: Quintana actually became the first UNSR to take specific aim at the ruling State Peace and Development Council's corporate partners, singling out problematic foreign oil companies operating in the country.

Coming after a 5-day mission to Burma, the report pulls no punches. It notes "rampant forced labor" connected to the country's four main natural gas projects, including the transnational Yadana gas pipeline to Thailand and the Shwe gas pipeline to China.

Confirming what's long been [documented](#), the report notes the Yadana and Shwe companies "rely on the Myanmar military to provide security for their projects."

Mentioning by name only South Korea's Daewoo International and Thailand's PTTEP, Quintana in effect implicated a who's who of Big Oil: The [Yadana](#) project, meaning "treasure," is operated by Total (France), Chevron (US), and PTTEP; and [Shwe](#), meaning "gold," is operated by Daewoo International, state-owned companies from India and South Korea, and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

While this is the UNSR's first mention of the human rights impacts of foreign-led energy projects in Burma, at [EarthRights International](#) (ERI), we've documented for years how overland gas pipelines and other billion-dollar installations in the country are physically secured by the Tatmadaw -- the Burmese Army -- resulting in forced labor, killings in cold blood, rape, torture, and other abuses against local residents.

The Tatmadaw is a decentralized, complicated organization of hundreds of thousands of poor, uneducated, predominantly ethnic Burman soldiers. It's the most powerful political actor in the ethnically diverse country, and the most brutal. It also happens to include thousands of impressionable [children](#), forced from their families, trained to be soldiers, and taught in the way of indiscriminate violence.

In 2009, one former child soldier explained to ERI how he was taken by the Tatmadaw from his family at age 15, and how his craven superiors ruthlessly burned the feet of children who tried to escape their clutches. This particular soldier "graduated" to provide security for Total and Chevron's pipeline, where he in turn conscripted local villagers for forced labor.

For years, Total and Chevron's pipeline has resulted in [abuses](#) like this: forced labor, killings, rape, torture. In recent weeks we documented two extrajudicial killings and numerous instances of forced labor committed by battalion #282, known locally as "Total's battalion," a notorious regiment that's been securing the project since the 1990s.

This is a grave problem. The burgeoning and controversial corporate social responsibility [agenda](#) hasn't effectively addressed it, regardless of what some companies and analysts claim, and victims of corporate

human rights abuses still lack [access to justice](#), despite [lawsuits](#) brought by Burmese villagers against Total and Unocal (now Chevron) in the companies' home states.

What's more, there's another batch of problems with Burma's gas sector. These involve cold hard cash, and were also noted by Quintana: For years, lucrative gas exports have lined the camouflaged pockets of the ruling military regime while the ailing country has sunk deeper into poverty. That's inherently problematic. In 2009, ERI calculated how Total and Chevron's pipeline generated over US\$7.5 billion dollars from 2000-2008, the lion's share going to the ruling junta.

This cash influx has only complicated the already deep military-politico complex in the country, not least of all by contributing to high-level corruption. Last September, we exposed how gas revenues from Total and Chevron's pipeline were being [siphoned](#) by the Burmese elite into offshore bank accounts in Singapore, rather than to the national economy or development.

Now, the same junta managing this cash is orchestrating the country's first elections in 20 years, controversially excluding over 2,100 [political prisoners](#) (by virtue of keeping them behind bars), including Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, whose National League for Democracy party just recently decided to [boycott](#) the elections.

In this context, the decision was made by the junta and its partners to simultaneously move forward with the construction of yet another pipeline: the [Shwe gas pipeline](#) to China, operated by Daewoo and CNPC. Costing nearly US\$2 billion to construct, it'll be almost 20 times longer than Yadana, moving gas valued at a whopping US\$30 billion, according to the [Shwe Gas Movement](#).

The pipeline comes amidst a palpable threat of civil war between the Tatmadaw and non-state ethnic armies near the northern end of the project, in Shan State, where there's a danger of thousands of refugee out-flows to China.

Villagers in some areas of the project aren't thinking about elections as much as the risk they'll lose their land and have to do forced labor. Where construction has already begun, so too have [land confiscations](#) and [persecutions](#) against the pipeline's dissenters.

In a politically unstable "election year," when the world's attention will focus on Burma, one would think that risky transnational mega-development projects would be approached with caution, by both the junta and its corporate partners.

Apparently, that's not the case.

Rather than move full speed ahead, Daewoo International, its partners, and CNPC should instead listen to the Shwe Gas Movement and EarthRights International: the companies should postpone the Shwe pipeline and any work on offshore installations until there's no risk the project will contribute to human rights violations -- that would be good business. In the meantime, the companies should promote public participation in development decisions; conduct transparent, inclusive third-party environmental and human rights impact assessments according to international standards; and practice complete revenue transparency, including publishing taxes, fees, royalties, bonuses, and social benefits paid to the Burmese authorities.

For companies who've ignored the risks and already made the mistake of being involved in a fully operational oil and gas project in Burma -- like Total, Chevron, and PTTEP -- they ought to take immediate steps to mitigate their harmful impacts. At a bare minimum, they should:

1. Practice complete revenue transparency.
2. Facilitate complaints of forced labor to the International Labour Organization.
3. Acknowledge an accurate sphere-of-responsibility, determined by actual social and political impacts, and take steps to mitigate the local harms caused by Tatmadaw forces securing the project.
4. Commission ongoing human rights and environmental impact assessments according to international standards, including the safe participation of local communities.

[ASEAN's dream may not come true if it fails to tame its unprincipled member, Burma - By Zin Linn](#)

Asian Tribune – 13 April 2010

At the end of the 16th ASEAN Summit in the Vietnamese capital Ha Noi on April 9, the Chairman of ASEAN Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung called on Burma/Myanmar to stick to its "road map to democracy" and hold free, fair and inclusive elections.

Nguyen Tan Dung further said, "We were briefed by H.E. Prime Minister Thein Sein of Myanmar on recent political developments and the progress made in the implementation of the Roadmap for Democracy, especially the preparations for the general election in Myanmar in 2010.

We underscored the importance of national reconciliation in Myanmar and the holding of the general election in a free, fair, and inclusive manner, thus contributing to Myanmar's stability and development. We also stressed the need that Myanmar would continue to work with ASEAN and United Nations in this process."

The Heads of the ASEAN Member States, gathered in Ha Noi for the 16th ASEAN Summit on 8-9 April 2010 also agreed that ASEAN would act swiftly at national, regional and global levels to achieve sustained economic recovery and development for ASEAN in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis. ASEAN is superficially committed to accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the South-East Asia region, to strengthen the institution for a prosperous and composed community of Southeast Asian nations. So far one of its members is a military-ruled nation that pays no attention to the norms of the grouping. How can the association ignore the recalcitrance of its desperado member, Burma or Myanmar?

ASEAN aims to promote regional peace and stability through respect for justice and the rule of law compliant with the U.N. Charter. It has just stressed the importance of bringing the ASEAN Charter into life in all aspects at the earliest.

Yet it shuts its eyes while extrajudicial killings and violence against women and children take place daily in Burma, one of its members. There is no law and order at all under Burma's military dictatorship.

Burma, world's worst human rights violator

People of Burma have suffered under high-handed military rulers since 1962. The regime has earned a reputation as one of the world's worst human rights violators. It inhumanly suppressed pro-democracy movements in 1988, followed by, during the Depayin conspiracy on May 30, 2003, and in the Saffron Revolution in September 2007, as well as in many other sporadic crackdowns. The junta has arrested nearly 2,200 political dissidents including the Nobel laureate of Burma, who has been confined to her residence for the 14 of the last 20 years.

The regime held a deceptive referendum at gunpoint in May, 2008, just a few days after Cyclone Nargis devastated the country. The junta said its 2008 Constitution was "approved" by more than 90 per cent of the qualified voters in the referendum, which has been widely dismissed as a fraud.

The worst of the so-called Nargis Constitution is that it provides the blanket immunity to the members of the military junta for their past human rights violations. It also provides a special status for military to live above the law and to practice coup at its will. However, to prevent the participation of key political figures, the 2008 constitution bars the political prisoners including the Lady and the ethnic leaders to contest in the polls. The constitution also does not recognize the ethnic people's demand for a federal union guaranteeing self-determination and equal opportunity.

The regime has ignored calls from the international community and Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, to review the 2008 Constitution, which will only bring further troubles to the Burmese people.

People are convinced that, like the referendum held at gunpoint, the secret ballot will not be free, fair and inclusive. The junta may not be able to deal with the worsening socio-economic situation if it continues to turn down the national reconciliation process being urged by the opposition NLD, the United Nationalities Alliance and the Association of the Veteran Politicians. Without National Reconciliation settlement, Burma may not prevail over the current political and economic hardships.

Three key benchmarks at least for good start

In the mean time, 'Burma's movement for Democracy and Rights of Ethnic Nationalities' which represents multi-ethnic political and civil society organizations inside and outside the country working for national

reconciliation, has expressed three key benchmarks toward the military regime. Three key benchmarks are to release all political prisoners, to stop all hostilities against ethnic and pro-democracy groupings and inclusive dialogue with key stakeholders plus review of 2008 Constitution. Those benchmarks are appropriate as minimum conditions to be met to begin a good start for peaceful Burma.

But, the character of the junta shows clearly that it has no plan to pay attention to international and domestic concerns, release political prisoners or commence a dialogue for reconciliation. According to a Burmese forecaster, it is baseless to believe that the military dictators are going to build a democratic country by means of the 2008 constitution and it is also useless to wait for a helping hand from the ASEAN for democratization in this military ruled country.

Peoples from all walks of life are severely suffering from a lot of miseries under the military regime which is in the saddle for nearly five decades. The consequences of this reign of violence produce spilling over effects directly into territories of the neighboring countries, especially Thailand and Malaysia.

Burmese workers flee to Thailand

Over the past two decades, more than a million Burmese workers have fled to Thailand. This has placed tremendous pressure on the Thai governments which has been facing its own civil unrests. Trans-border crime has gone up with a massive influx of narcotics drugs, including heroin and methamphetamines. Trafficking in women and children has increased along the 2,400 km-long Thailand-Burma border. The regime's neglect of health-care has also produced a new HIV/AIDS flow into neighboring countries.

Within the country, the living standards of average citizens are rapidly falling. The situation is alarming even on the outskirts of Yangon. According to the UN estimation, one child in three under the age of five is suffering from malnutrition.

The junta's generals are well-bred gentlemen in front of the ASEAN counterparts where as they are the inhumane dictators to their own populace, especially to the various ethnic groups in Burma.

ASEAN has agreed at the end of the 16th ASEAN Summit that it would act swiftly at national, regional and global levels to achieve sustained economic recovery and development for ASEAN in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis. If ASEAN failed to take responsibility taming of its unprincipled member, ASEAN's dream - Strategy for Economic Recovery and Development – may not come true due to lack of teamwork among member countries, especially Burma the black sheep.

The suffering of the people of Burma has been going on for five decades. The member nations have a moral duty to do whatever they can to help the people of Burma reach a peaceful and sustainable political settlement. No effort may cause a dire reputation toward the association.

In conclusion, ASEAN ought to support three key benchmarks - to release all political prisoners, to stop all hostilities against ethnic and pro-democracy groupings and inclusive dialogue with key stakeholders plus review of 2008 Constitution – solving Burma question as well as raising the association's dignity higher. People of Burma need ASEAN's sympathy.

Zin Linn: The author, a freelance Burmese journalist, lives in exile. He is vice-president of Burma Media Association, which is affiliated with the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers. \

13/04/2010

News

[Suu Kyi has heart tests in hospital](#)

Mizzima - 12 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi had a suspected heart check-up at Rangoon General Hospital (RGH) on Sunday evening, National League for Democracy (NLD) party leaders have said.

Party spokesman Nyan Win told Mizzima that details were sketchy. "We don't know yet in detail. We know only that she underwent a medical check-up and examination by doctors and then she went back home. We have just learned about it", he said.

But, party Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Win Tin had more information after speaking to her family physician. "We heard from Dr. Tin Myo Win that her health condition was good but we heard again on Sunday night that she was taken to RGH and was checked with cardiac medical equipment for about 45 minutes. If it was for an ECG test, it could have been done at her home," he said.

The clinical examinations included an ECG test at RGH on Sunday night from 9.15pm to 9.30pm. She then arrived back at home at 9.45pm, sources said.

Dr. Tin Myo Win had taken cardiac monitoring equipment to her home and checked her heart on April 8, in what was her second check-up for the month. Aung San Suu Kyi receives a routine check-up at her home on the first Thursday of every month and additional checks when necessary.

She told her lawyers when they visited her home to discuss her legal cases that she was being administered medicine for low blood pressure and gastric disease. She had also suffered from leg cramps last May.

Dr. Tin Myo Win was unavailable for further comment when contacted by phone on Monday.

The Nobel Peace laureate was charged last May with breach of her house arrest terms over US citizen John Yettaw's uninvited visit to her crumbling villa after he swam across Inya Lake in Rangoon. A trial court sentenced her to three-years jail last August over the matter. But junta leader Senior General Than Shwe commuted her sentence to 18 months and ordered that it be served under house arrest.

[Rohingya Rejected Again](#)

RFA – 12 April 2010

Bangladesh won't recognize thousands of asylum-seekers, as health experts decry their plight.

BANGKOK—Bangladesh has rejected a U.N. proposal that it grant refugee status to tens of thousands of ethnic minority Muslims from Burma who fled in hope of asylum and a better life, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes has said.

"They must go back to their land," Quayes told reporters Saturday in the Bangladesh capital, Dhaka, according to news reports.

Some 200,000 Rohingya, ethnic Muslims who live in fear of arrest and deportation and lack access to the services provided at international refugee camps, have fled to Bangladesh from Burma, whose authorities don't recognize them as citizens.

Bangladesh does recognize as refugees some 28,000 Rohingya who live in two official camps run by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Bangladesh government.

Quayes said Bangladesh won't extend that recognition to any more asylum-seekers. Authorities in Bangladesh fear recognizing them would encourage a flood of new migrants.

'Not possible'

"We have categorically informed him [the U.N. regional coordinator] that this is not possible," Quayes told reporters at a Foreign Ministry briefing, referring to a proposal to recognize the 200,000 unregistered Rohingya.

He said Bangladesh is ready to work with the United Nations on giving access and protection to 28,000 Rohingya refugees in the two official camps.

But he added, "We don't want to discuss about the rest of the Myanmar [Burmese] nationals living elsewhere in Bangladesh illegally."

"We have not dumped them in concentration camps," Quayes said. He also took aim at international media and NGOs for publicizing what he called "untrue" stories about the Rohingya.

International right groups have alleged that Dhaka is cracking down on the group, arresting and repatriating many and stepping up security along the porous border to prevent more from arriving.

In 1992, 250,000 Rohingya, around one-third of their total population, fled over Burma's border into Bangladesh, citing persecution in Burma. But since 1993, the government has denied 200,000 subsequent Rohingya arrivals official refugee status, making them ineligible for U.N. aid and protection.

In a recent report, the U.N. Special Rapporteur voiced "deep concern" over the plight of the Rohingya in the northern part of Burma, which doesn't recognize the Rohingya as one of 135 registered ethnic minorities.

According to New York-based Human Rights Watch, abuses by Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies against those who have fled "are reported to be widespread in and around Rohingya refugee camps, including reports of sexual violence against women."

"In the two official refugee camps of Nayapara and Kutupalong, people are routinely punished for traveling outside the camp to find food or money and often must resort to selling meager rations to corrupt camp officials or outside merchants," it said.

"Authorities refuse to permit permanent structures to be built in the camps as a way of encouraging refugees to return home. Children are denied access to education. The provision of health services and access to medicines is also limited by the authorities, as are work and livelihood opportunities inside the camp."

'One of the worst'

But the unregistered Rohingya asylum-seekers are suffering even more without food, education, medical care, clean water, or sanitation, according to Richard Sollom of Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights.

"I've been to a number of refugee camps around the world and I would say that this is one of the worst—at the unofficial camp in Kutupalong," Sollom said in a interview here.

They live in "makeshift dwellings of ripped plastic and twigs and bark that is gathered from the woods nearby ... given the upcoming monsoon season, this is going to be an issue not only for their shelter, but for the spread of infectious diseases," he said.

The Rohingya in Bangladesh suffer further from chronic and acute malnutrition, which causes stunting, cognitive impairment, and developmental delays in children, he said. "This is from years of being underfed—and not receiving the proper nutrients."

Bangladeshi police and border security forces have been conducting hour-to-house searches for the Rohingya and continue to deport them to Burma, he said.

"Eighteen percent of the children surveyed [in the Kutupalong makeshift camp] have acute malnutrition," Sollom said.

"[When the number reaches] over 15 percent—the U.N. World Health Organization determines that is a critical emergency requiring immediate food aid to be delivered to this population through the entire camp, not only the children."

When he asked the Rohingya to show him their possessions, Sollom said, "nine out of 10 brought out two aluminum pots, some roots they had gathered, a spoon, a knife, and a plastic bucket to collect water.

Grim options

Back in Burma, according to Chris Beyrer, a medical doctor who has spent years working with Burmese refugees, health indices aren't much better, with six times as many children dying before age five there as in neighboring Thailand.

The Rohingya drew global attention last year when the Thai military was accused of towing the boats of as many as 1,000 asylum-seekers out to sea and leaving them to drift at the mercy of the currents without adequate food and water.

The Rohingya themselves say they are Muslim descendants of Persian, Turkish, Bengali, and Pathan traders, who migrated to Burma as early as the 7th century A.D. But their ethnic identity isn't widely recognized.

Rights groups say they are particularly vulnerable to human traffickers, and their case is now being taken up by the Bali Process, a human-smuggling summit involving more than 40 regional nations.

Original reporting by RFA's Burmese service. Burmese service director: Nancy Shwe. Additional reporting and English production by Sarah Jackson-Han.

[More military intelligence men in Northern Arakan](#)

KPN - 9 April 2010

Maungdaw, Arakan State: The Burmese military junta has dispatched fresh batch of military intelligence personnel along the Burmese border security force's (Nasaka) section area of the Burma-Bangladesh border area on April 5, according to a Nasaka aide from Maungdaw.

Three intelligence personnel have been posted in the camp of the Nasaka along the Burma-Bangladesh border, the aide said.

"Earlier, we had one military intelligence personnel in one Nasaka camp, but, now there are three - one sergeant, one sub corporal and a private," said a Nasaka official from Maungdaw.

"The intelligence men will watch the area where they are stationed and monitor people's activities with an eye to the forthcoming election," the officer added.

"Before we had one military intelligence personnel, now we have three for harassing, extortion and torture," said an elder from Taungbru sub town of Maungdaw.

"There will be more face offs between Nasaka and intelligence men as they will try to amass easy money from us," said an illegal cross border business man.

[Burmese Kyat Rises in Value on Western Border](#)

Narinjara News – 13 April 2010

By Takaloo, Maungdaw:

The value of the Burmese Kyat has been gradually rising since the beginning of this year in exchange with the Bangladesh Taka on the western border, with the exchange rate on Monday set at 13.00 Kyat per 1.00 Taka, said a Burmese black market exchange agent from Maungdaw on the western Burmese border.

The agent also said that the value of the Kyat in the current exchange rate is the highest recorded in the past six years, during which time it has ranged from between 15.00 and 20.00 Kyat for 1.00 Taka.

"The Kyat has been rising against the Taka gradually since January, and the exchange rate here today is just 13.00 Kyat for 1.00 Taka. It used to rise and fall between 15.00 and 20.00 Kyat per 1.00 Taka and we can say the value of the Kyat with the current rate is the highest ever in our records for the last six years here on the western border," said the agent.

It is difficult explain why the Burmese Kyat has been rising in value against the Bangladesh Taka, as there is no official source for the money exchange on either side of the border and the official rate pegged against the dollar today is 1.00 Burmese Kyat to 10.43 Bangladeshi Taka.

However, the agent said the increase in the Kyat's value in the border markets is probably due to the fact that legal and black market trade across the border is using US Dollars for their payment clearance, and because the Burmese Kyat has been rising in value against the US Dollar since the beginning of this year.

According to local border sources, most Burmese cross-border traders have been relying on black market agents in Singapore and Rangoon for their money transfers and payments for their trade with Bangladesh, and the use of local border agents is declining.

With the rise of the Kyat, the export of Burmese goods and contraband into Bangladesh is slowing and prices of the exported goods have been rising in the Bangladesh border markets.

Burmese timber at the Teknaf Port in Bangladesh are currently priced at 225,000 Taka per one ton of teak, 77,500 Taka per one ton of Champac, and 52,500 Taka per one ton of other low-quality wood such as dipterocarpus alatus.

Other legal and illegal export goods, such as rice, cattle, bamboo, fresh and dry fish, spices, raisins, traditional medicine, cosmetics, clothing, and other items, have risen in price by 15 - 30 percent in the Bangladesh border markets.

12/04/2010

News

[Doctor visits Suu Kyi twice in eight days](#)

Mizzima - 10 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – Burmese democracy icon and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, was medically examined by her family doctor on Thursday for the second time in eight days.

The doctor's visit was confirmed by NLD spokespersons and her lawyers, who said she may be suffering from low blood pressure and gastric problems.

Dr. Tin Myo Win her family physician was allowed by the junta authorities to examine her on Thursday, her lawyer Kyi Win told Mizzima. The doctor is permitted to visit the National League for Democracy General Secretary on the first Thursday of each month.

"When we met her last Wednesday and discussed matters we didn't think that she was ill. But she told us she felt dizzy and had low blood pressure. We informed the authorities about her health. They in turn informed her family doctor. We have heard Dr. Tin Myo Win examined her but we are not aware of the details," Kyi Win said.

NLD leaders said that the doctor carried an ECG machine to her house on Thursday.

"We have heard about her medical checkup. Her family doctor took an ECG machine for a checkup. We don't know her detailed health situation," NLD vice-chairman Tin Oo said.

"I heard Aung San Suu Kyi was suffering from a gastric problem and is on medicine. Maybe the side effect of the medicine was making her dizzy. I too have heard Dr Tin Myo Win took an ECG machine to her home," NLD CEC member Win Tin said.

"Aung San Suu Kyi is a sparse eater. So, she could have developed gastric and had to take medicines. But, I think her illness is not serious," he added.

Mizzima was unable to reach Dr Tin Myo Win for details of his visit to Aung San Suu Kyi.

Last year May, an American citizen John William Yettaw swam across the Inya Lake and entered her home illegally. She was sentenced to three years in prison for flouting her detention laws. But, junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe reduced it to 18 months of house arrest by an executive order.

[EU urged to join calls for UN probe](#)

Mizzima - 9 April 2010

New Delhi – The European Union should follow the lead of its members United Kingdom and Czech Republic in calling for a United Nations commission of inquiry into serious crimes committed by the Burmese junta, campaigners have said.

Burma Campaign UK, based in London, on Thursday applauded the Czech Republic's stance on its support for the establishment of commission of inquiry to probe possible crimes against humanity committed by the Burmese rulers. Similar commissions have been set up to examine events in the Darfur region of Sudan and Lebanon.

Prague, in response to a reporter's questions, said: "The Czech Republic remains concerned at continuous grave human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar. Despite the government's 'Roadmap to Democracy' and before the expected this year's elections, political repression, and military attacks against civilians of ethnic nationalities continue in scale and gravity that may entail international crimes under the terms of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court."

Mizzima contacted Czech Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Filip Kanda, who confirmed the government's stance.

The Rome Statute is the treaty that established the International Criminal Court (ICC) after a UN General Assembly in 1998 convened a diplomatic conference in Rome. It came into effect in 2002. As of last October, 110 states are party to the statute and 38 states have signed but not ratified the treaty. It defines the functions, jurisdiction and structure of the permanent tribunal to punish individuals who commit genocide and other serious international crimes.

"We believe that the possibility of establishing a commission of inquiry should be seriously examined," the original reply said, as quoted on the Burma Campaign UK website.

The Czech Republic is the third country to call for the UN to establish a commission of inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in the military-ruled Southeast Asian nation, after Australia and the United Kingdom last month expressed backing for such a move.

In response to that stance, Burma Campaign director Mark Farmaner on Thursday said: "It is time that the EU discussed officially adopting support for a UN inquiry, and should include this in the draft United Nations General Assembly resolution on Burma later this year."

He said, as with the Czech Republic, it is time other EU countries also began to take the initiative and support the call for the establishing a commission of inquiry, he said. "We want other European countries to come aboard and we hope the European Union will officially support as they support the global arms embargo," Mr Farmaner told Mizzima.

The calls for such an inquiry on Burma and to bring the ruling generals to the ICC have long been raised by campaigners. But UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, last month brought fresh momentum with his recommendation for such an investigation. Mr Quintana, who has made three visits to the country in the almost two years since taking the UN post, said the continuing rights violations needed to be investigated because of the "pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights".

[Naypyitaw turns down Wa's latest proposal](#)

SHAN - 10 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

Latest reports say Naypyitaw has turned down the United Wa State Army (UWSA)'s latest 8 point counterproposal submitted to Naypyitaw on 3 April, yesterday.

Yesterday morning, a 7 men junta delegation led by Col Than Htut Thein, Staff Officer Grade 1, of the Triangle Region Command and the Wa delegation led by Vice Chairman No.1 Xiao Minliang, held a meeting at the Wa headquarters, Panghsang from 8:30 to 10:00 over Naypyitaw's response to the group, said an informed source from the Sino-Burma border.

The junta delegation did not refer directly to the Wa proposal. It only reminded the group that if they accepted the principle to transform itself into junta run border guard force, they must totally abide by the Naypyitaw's BGF program, "nothing more and nothing less."

"They did not mention the Wa proposal, but what they said was connected to all the points written in it," he said.

For instance, the first point of the proposal was to keep Mongpawk and Mongphen under Wa administration (Naypyitaw has placed Mongpawk-Mongphen inside Mongyang township, under Burma Army control).

The junta's response on the point was the two towns have been officially in Mongyang township for decades; that the group was already given 6 townships: Hopang, Pangwai, Mongmai, Panghsang, Markmang (Metman) and Naphan townships, according to its 2008 constitutions.

"Nobody can change what is already written in the constitution," a source quoted Lt.Col Than Htut Thein as saying.

Afterwards, Vice Chairman Xiao Minliang reportedly thanked the junta delegation for the response to their proposal, saying the group will respond to Naypyitaw again as soon as the group has finished considering among themselves regarding Napyitaw's stand.

The Wa leadership is expected to be holding a meeting together with officers from the southern Wa 171st Military Region who recently arrived in Panghsang.

Likewise, negotiations between the other ethnic ceasefire group, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Burma Army have failed regarding the BGF program, according to Kachin News Group (KNG) report yesterday.

At the same time, more Burma Army movements in ethnic ceasefire groups' areas: Wa, National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Shan State Army (SSA) 'North' and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) are being reported.

[Kachin leaders to speak out about failed negotiations to form the BGF](#)

KNG - 9 April 2010

Burma's ethnic Kachin leaders will speak publically in northern Kachin State about failed negotiations with the Burmese junta regarding formation of the new Border Guard Force, next Friday, April 16th, local sources said.

The Kachin Independence Organization, the last remaining Kachin armed group, will conduct a public meeting which is to be held in the group's headquarters, in Laiza, in east of Kachin State, near the China border, said KIO officials.

The meeting has to be held after the junta's April 28 deadline, which is the second time it demanded the KIO respond with a clear answer on whether it will accept the formation of the proposed BGF.

The first deadline, February 28, expired without a clear decision from the KIO.

The Kachin public, as well as social and religious leaders and regional representatives from Kachin State and Northeast Shan State, are invited to the meeting by the KIO. It will be the 3rd public meeting called by the group concerning the transformation of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of KIO, into the junta-proposed BGF since April, last year, according to KIO officials in Laiza.

In the meeting, KIO leaders will officially reveal their reasons the dialogue between the KIO and the Burmese junta about forming the BGF failed, even though delegates from both sides met at least 13 times in the Kachin capital of Myitkyina.

Burmese military leader, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, wants the KIO to respond with "acceptance or rejection" of the proposed BGF. However, the KIO has avoided a clear answer and proposed to Snr-Gen Than Shwe that it would like to discuss the armed-wing issue after the political problems between the two sides are resolved.

In fact, the KIO itself has a plan for transforming the KIA in principle, immediately after Kachins have their political rights restored in the Kachin land and all the political problems are resolved between the KIO and the majority Burman-led government, according to KIO leaders.

On the issue of transforming the KIA to the junta-proposed BGF, the KIO called the first public meeting in Laiza in May 12 and 13, last year and the second public meeting in Laiza on September 5 in the same year.

In the two meetings, Kachin people rejected the idea of a new civil war between the Burmese junta and the KIO. But, they disagreed with the junta's plan to disarm the KIO to form the new BGF before the root political problems between them are resolved, according to the meeting's statements.

Currently, the KIO is increasingly under pressure to accept the Burmese junta's proposal regarding the BGF, which was also suggested in a letter from leaders of other Kachin armed groups--- New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) and Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group which were disarmed by the junta late last year and Dr. Tu Ja, former Vice-president No. 2 of KIO while transforming to the BGF.

[Military officers preaches that new Baptist teachers should support Burma's junta](#)

KNG - 10 April 2010

Men and women just graduating from training to be Kachin Baptist preachers, in Burma's northern Kachin They were told to preach that church followers should support the military junta's mission in Kachin State, by the Northern Regional Commander of the junta, preachers said.

Maj-Gen Soe Win visited the 20-day training for all pre-service Baptist preachers at Kachin Theological College (KTC), in Nawng Nang village, 10 miles north of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

The KTC is hosting the 6th Pre-service Preacher Training of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), which represents over 400,000 followers in military-ruled Burma.

Over 200 pre-service graduate students from different Theological schools in the country, who will serve in the churches under the KBC, began the training April 5.

Commander Soe Win told the audience, "All go back home to your churches and preach to followers to stop anti-dam protests of the Irrawaddy River. Preach and persuade Baptist followers and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) to accept the junta-proposed Border Guard Force (BGF)".

Moreover, the commander informed them the KTC will have to work under management of the Shalom Foundation, also called the Nyein Foundation, a national NGO led by Rev. Dr. Lahtaw Saboi Jum, former general secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) and the ruling junta. He also mentioned that the junta will continue to co-operate the KTC, preachers said.

Maj-Gen Soe Win also donated 1,000,000 Kyat (US\$1,020) to the KTC, which was received by Dr. Saga Hkyen Naw, the KTC's former principle who retired after 20-years of service last month, said participants.

Commander Soe Win was accompanied at yesterday's meeting by his vice-commander, Brig-Gen San Htun, other high ranking military officers in the Command and about 100 members of the junta-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association, according to KTC sources.

Because the Kachin communities are dominated by Christian Churches, since late 2007, the Buddhist military junta has significantly used the churches and church leaders as a political tool to push the KIO to accept the junta-proposed BGF, as well as organizing Kachin people to vote in the upcoming elections to be held later this year.

No date has been announced for the election.

[Junta Unmanned Aircraft Project Stalled](#)

Irrawaddy – 9 April 2010

By Nayee Lin Let

A construction project dedicated to building unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) for the Burmese military has been delayed for one year due to a lack of a computerized control program, military sources said.

According to Air Force sources, the UAV project is being directed by Brig-Gen Thein Naing, the son-in-law of junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

An officer at the Aircraft Production and Repair Base Headquarters (Mingaladon) (APRBH) said the aircraft body construction unit needs to acquire better technology for the construction of the UAV body and more engineers with technical expertise on aircraft control systems.

"A Chinese company wanted to sell a UAV program and the Air Force agreed to buy it, and the project began," said the officer.

He said that no military officers returning from scholarships abroad have studied UAV aircraft control system.

"Those who have better computer knowledge in our unit were listed and five junior officers (engineers) led by a captain were sent for technical training," said an Air Force engineer.

A retired Air Force officer said the UAV project was started even though engineers from the APRBH were only experienced in small-scaled repair of existing aircraft.

"The implementation team of the UAV project consists of some 30 pilots and senior engineers led by a pilot Lt-Col," said the retired officer.

The size of the planned UAV aircraft is not known.

The Web site of the Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University in Meikhtila Township, Mandalay Division, highlights a project for a small UAV that is being carried out by students and teachers at the university (http://www.most.gov.mm/maeu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=34).

UAVs are designed in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, configurations and characteristics and have been used in various areas, performing reconnaissance as well as attack missions.

For the past two years, the US military has used UAVs in Pakistan in nearly 100 attacks on Taliban and Al-Qaeda personnel.

[Maung Aye Visits Troops in Shan State](#)

Irrawaddy – 9 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Burma's No. 2 general, Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye, who is also commander in chief of the Burmese armed forces, visited government troops in northeastern and eastern Burma this week amid speculation of an outbreak of armed conflict in the northeastern frontier.

Military sources in Shan State said the purpose of Maung Aye's tour in Shan State was to encourage government forces and their family members who are worried about the resumption of armed conflict in the region sparked from tensions over the junta's border guard force (BGF) plan, a government proposal to integrate ethnic armies into Burmese army command in border areas.

The junta set April 22 as a new deadline for various ethnic armies to accept the BGF plan, including the strongest ethnic insurgent group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which has an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 soldiers, as well as its ally, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), which is based in the eastern Shan State town of Mongla.

Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the junta's negotiator with ethnic armed groups, reportedly told the UWSA and NDAA officials at separate meetings in late March that if they do not respond positively to the junta's call to accept the BGF plan by April 22, they will face legal action.

In preparation for conflict, family members of government troops in Shan State have been called up for basic military training since March.

“Even women here have to attend military training,” said a military source in Shan State. “Everyone is worried about war.”

The UWSA and the NDAA have put their troops on alert and have mobilized their war offices, according to sources close to the ethnic groups.

Despite the tension, businessmen in the area report that it is business as usual on the road from Riuli to Lashio, the main Sino-Burmese border trading route.

“Trade is running as normal at the moment. Nothing unusual has happened here,” a businessman in Muse, a border town, said. “However, we have learned that the Burmese government is restricting border trade through areas controlled by the UWSA and the KIO [Kachin Independence Organization].”

The Burmese state-run-newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* also reported this week that Maung Aye was in northern and southern Shan State. He attended a graduation ceremony at the Defense Services (Army) Officers Training School in Bahtoo, southern Shan State, and toured a pagoda and hospital in northern Shan State.

Maung Aye was accompanied by other senior generals, including: Quartermaster-General Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo who also holds the position of junta secretary-1; Chief of Military Ordnance Lt-Gen Tin Aye; and Lt-Gen Min Aung Hlaing and Lt-Gen Ohn Myint, who are chiefs of the Bureau of Special Operations 2 and 6 respectively.

Maung Aye also met key military commanders in Shan State and talked with the commander of Eastern Regional Military Command, Maj-Gen Yar Pyae, in southern Shan State, and Maj-Gen Aung Than Htut in northern Shan State.

During his speech at the graduation ceremony in Bahtoo, Maung Aye vowed that the Burmese army would repulse all forms of danger that could harm the independence and sovereignty of the nation.

State television and newspapers have shown pictures of Maung Aye alongside junta supremo Snr-Gen Than Shwe on Thursday at Naypyidaw Airport. Burma’s top two generals saw off Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein who was going to face the international community at the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Hanoi over the electoral law issue.

News - Elections

[Political Parties Appreciate Exiled Media](#)

Irrawaddy – 9 April 2010

By Kyaw Thein Kha

Several political parties that have registered to contest the upcoming election have said they appreciate the role of the Burmese media in exile and their coverage of the political process in Burma.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Friday, several party leaders expressed the importance of a free press, and noted the advantages the exiled press have over local journals and news publications which are severely censored by the military government.

“The contribution of exiled media is effective to the political process. We’ve seen such good potential from the exiled media,” said Ohn Lwin, the spokesman of the Rangoon-based National Political Alliance League, which registered for the election on April 1.

“The exiled media have a wider vision,” he added. “Their analysis is stronger than the local media.”

After the election laws were announced last month, the military government’s notorious censorship board, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), began banning comments and analysis, and censoring articles related to the election in local journals. Rangoon journalists said that any analysis of the election laws or the 2008 Constitution is censored.

On March 17, the censorship board announced that, according to the 1962 Publishing Act, all party documents and records, including the party's platform and statements concerning its ideology, that the party intends to distribute publicly, must be approved by and registered at the censorship board.

On top of that, each party must pay 100,000 kyat (US \$100) for a "publishing license" and 500,000 kyat (\$500) as a deposit, which can be withheld if the party distributes any documents without the permission of the PSRD.

"The rights of the press between the exiled and local media are very different," said Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein, a leader of the Democratic Party. "Whatever we want to say or print has to pass through the censors. We don't use any offensive words. We speak intelligently. But our words are banned by the censorship board."

"Media are most important in politics," said Nan Shwe Kyar, the spokesperson of the Nationalist NLD. "We thank the exiled media, because they can widely and freely broadcast news so that the public understands a situation. We see the exiled media as being effective, not only for the Burmese people, but for the international community at large."

The PSRD is powerless to prevent exiled Burmese media, such as *The Irrawaddy*, which is based in Thailand, from broadcasting and reporting updates, news, political analysis and commentaries about the military government's policies and election laws.

On the other hand, the military-controlled newspapers constantly criticize and try to discredit the exiled media.

Currently, state-run newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* runs with a box on its back page every day with bullet points reading: "VOA, BBC—sowing hatred among the people"; "RFA, DVB—generating public outrage"; and "Do not allow ourselves to be swayed by killer broadcasts designed to cause troubles."

Gov't Officials Training for Polls

Irrawaddy – 9 April 2010

Burma's newly formed Union Election Commission recently organized a two-day training in Naypyidaw for government officials who are to be appointed polling station officials, sources in the remote capital said.

The training was scheduled to be held from April 7 to 9 and was to involve 252 officials from the government departments of court, immigration and general administration. The commissioner of the Union Election Commission, Thein Soe, officially opened the training course.

"The training course is aimed at polling station officers at district and township level. Village and quarter level polling station officials will be appointed by the township authorities," said a source in Naypyidaw who is close to the commission.

"All polling station officers in the country have to be government staff. They learn the laws of Burma, the Political Party Registration Law, tactical laws and the official guidelines," he added.

On Wednesday, the Union Election Commission announced the formation of a sub-election commission across the country at state and division levels as well as at district levels. The commission announcement noted: "Offices of the sub-commissions will be opened at the respective State and Division General Administration Department offices."

Since the Burmese junta issued the election law in early March—which effectively bars pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in the election process or retaining membership with her party, the National League for Democracy—it has faced substantive international criticism. The international community, including China and Southeast Asian countries, have called for an inclusive free and fair election in Burma.

Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) called on Burma's military government to open up the election process at the bloc's 16th summit in Hanoi this week.

"The elections should be free and democratic, with the participation of all parties," said Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who chaired the Asean summit, at a press conference on Friday.

At the summit, Asean leaders offered to organize international observers for the election.

[Pro-democratic groups apprehends junta crackdown on NLD](#)

Narinjara News – 12 April 2010

Nava Thakuria:

The pro-democracy Burmese exiles and campaign groups apprehend a crackdown on the democratic organizations in the coming days.

Soon after the deadline May 7 (for political party registration to Burmese authority) crosses, the junta may go for strong actions against all the parties, who have decided not to join the elections sometime later this year, the democracy campaigners argue.

“We apprehend that the military rulers of Burma will go for repressive actions against the leader and activists of National League for Democracy soon after May 7. The junta may take the actions against those people as they remain critical towards the electoral laws,” said Khin Ohmar of Forum for Democracy in Burma.

In that case, she added, we have already asked the pro-democracy partner and well-wisher groups to be ready for a Global Day of Action in May. And before that the solidarity groups have planned to launch a massive campaign through the internet involving all sympathizers for democracy in Burma.

Meanwhile, a Global Campaign Against Burma’s 2010 Military Elections was launched last month. As more as ten alliances of Burma’s movement for democracy and rights of ethnic nationalities, and over 150 endorsing organizations from different parts of the globe formally launched the global campaign against the flawed electoral laws of Burma through a press conference in Bangkok on March 19.

Various speakers in the conference, including Khin Ohmar, foreign affairs secretary of FDB Naw Zipporah Sein, general secretary of Karen National Union and U Thein Oo, an MP-elect of the NLD in 1990 Burma election, guessed that the present military regime led by Senior General Than Shwe would start a crack down on the political parties, which had won 1990 election but denied political power.

[Two NLD township leaders freed](#)

Mizzima - 9 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – Following the completion of their prison terms, the Burmese military junta released two National league for Democracy (NLD) leaders of Bogalay Township.

The released political prisoners are Aung Khin Bo, Chairman of Bogalay Township (Irrawaddy Division) organization committee of the NLD and Mi Mi Sein, the Joint Secretary. They were freed on Friday morning.

Aung Khin Bo was released from Thayet prison and Mi Mi Sein was released from Insein prison.

“U Aung Khin Bo was released this morning. He is on his way and will be in Rangoon office tomorrow,” a party spokesman, Ohn Kyaing, said.

A total of 300 prisoners were released on April 9.

“I was released at 11 am. They released me because I completed my prison term,” Mi Mi Sein told Mizzima.

Aung Khin Bo and Mi Mi Sein participated in the Bogalay market protest against mounting fuel and commodity prices and were imprisoned in September 2007. They were charged with violation of Article 505 (b) of the Penal Code upsetting public tranquility and violation of Article 143 of the Penal Code - unlawful assembly and sentenced two years and six months.

"I was ill in prison and needed medical treatment. I arrived in the prison on September 10, 2009 and was in the hospital of the Insein prison. On September 18, they told me if I signed bond 401, I would be free. I refused. I believe that we were sentenced even though we did not flout the law so I refused to sign the bond and therefore I had to serve the full prison term," Mi Mi Sein said.

She said she supported the decision of NLD leaders, not to re-register the party because the electoral laws of the junta are unjust.

New Age People's Party denies financial support from USDA

Mizzima - 11 April 2010

By Min Thet

Rangoon - The New Age People's Party leaders, keen on contesting the election, have denied taking financial support from the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA).

The USDA and New Age People's Party have a good rapport. Both cooperate with the Chairman of the Rangoon City Development Committee Brigadier General Aung Thein Lin to provide social service to people. The rumour emanated because of this. The New Age People's Party has flatly denied it.

"We are just cooperating in the sphere of social work and have never accepted any kind of financial support from them," a Central Committee member of New Age People's Party, Aung Myint said. He added that they will raise party funds from authorized businesses, including the auction business.

"Our party funds come from membership fees. Moreover, we ask for donations from private citizens," the chairman of New Age People's Party, Htun Aung Kyaw said.

Though the leaders of the party denied the rumour, many Rangoon citizens believe that they are being supported by the Rangoon City Mayor.

The Mayor is in-charge of the USDA Rangoon Division and he has been cooperating with the leaders of the New Age People's Party in carrying out social services such as opening free schools and clinics, and building roads prior to the Referendum on the Constitution in May 2008, members of the USDA Rangoon Division said.

An employee of the Rangoon City Development Committee said, "I know them. They joined the Mayor and USDA. I read the news in the state-run newspaper that New Age People's Party has registered as a political party and I also noticed that the members of the party are from the team that cooperated with the USDA."

The party is derived from the new age political economics students' group formed in October 1980. It registered under the name "New Age People's Party" with the Election Commission on April 6.

The USDA was formed on 15 September 1993 to provide social services with its patron being junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe.

Arakan USDA Leaders Travel to Naypyidaw

Narinjara News - 12 April 2010

Sittwe: Leaders of the Arakan State Union Solidarity Development Association have traveled to Naypyidaw, the new capital of Burma, after authorities invited them there for the formation of the USDA political party, said a USDA member from Sittwe.

"All stated and district level leaders of the USDA in Arakan left for Naypyidaw last week to discuss the formation of the USDA party to run in the upcoming election," he said.

The USDA delegation from Arakan State is being led by U Kyaw Win, secretary of the Arakan State USDA, and left for Naypyidaw from the state capital Sittwe by plane on 9 April.

"Now they are attending the USDA meeting in Naypyidaw and the meeting will end before the Burmese new year, Thingyan. They will return to Arakan State today or tomorrow with the new plan for the USDA for the election," he said.

A source from Sittwe reports that the USDA organization will register with the Election Commission in the near future after the organization is transformed into a party that can contest in the 2010 election.

Lt Col U Kyaw Zan Hla, a senior retired army officer, reportedly will lead the Arakan State USDA party and the Burmese military has selected him to serve as the minister of the state.

A politician from Sittwe said, "U Kyaw Zan Hla is chief of the USDA in Arakan State and he accompanied General Than Shwe whenever the general came to Arakan to organize in the state."

USDA members in Arakan State have been working to organize people in Arakan to support the USDA party in the upcoming election. According to a local source, army officials in Arakan are backing the USDA leaders in order to more freely and successfully organize people during their trips to the many villages in Arakan State.

[Ethnic Palaung party applies for party registration](#)

SHAN - 11 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

An ethnic Palaung party had applied for registration with the Election Commission on 8 April to be allowed to contest in the forthcoming general elections, according to Mai Ai Phone, Chairman of Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF).

The application took place on the same day with the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) led by Sai Ai Pao, the well to do salt trader from Namkham who has made his home in Rangoon.

The party's name is Palaung National Party (PNP). Its founding Chairman is Mai Ai Mong, 63, the former Chairman of the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) one of the ceasefire groups that was forced to surrender in 2005.

It is one of the Shan State groups seeking registration.

However, the party has yet to decide about in which townships it is going to contest, because the party has just submitted application for registration, said Mai Ai Phone. "The party's policies are still undisclosed."

According to the 2008 constitution, Palaung people were given 2 townships: Mantong and Namhsan in Northern Shan State as their self administrative zone.

The Palaungs, who call themselves Ta-ang, come from the Mon-Khmer stock, the same family that includes Mon, Cambodians and Wa. Together with PaO, they are the second largest in population in Shan State, according to the pre-1962 Shan State Government statistics.

[Leading Arakanese Party Decides Not to Register for Election](#)

Narinjara News – 12 April 2010

Rangoon: The Arakan League for Democracy, a leading state political party, has decided not to register with the Election Commission or to contest in the military-sponsored election. The decision was made at an emergency party meeting held in Rangoon on 10 April.

U Aye Tha Aung, joint-secretary of the party, said, "The 2008 constitution is neither for ethnic rights nor human rights in Burma. The constitution and other election laws are not fair or just. Because of that, our party decided not to register as a party and not to contest in the election."

A few senior leaders attended the meeting and agreed unanimously not to register with the Election Commission.

Although the ALD has not registered to contest the election, the party will continue their activities working for democracy, ethnic rights, and equal rights in Burma, the party leaders said.

U Tha Noe Aung, an active member of the ALD in Sittwe, said, "Our leaders gathered in Rangoon on 10 April and made the decision. We all welcomed the party leaders' decision not to register with the Election Commission or to contest in the upcoming election, as the decision is acceptable for all democratic activists."

The ALD is a leading political party among the Arakanese community and won 11 seats in the 1990 military-sponsored election, but the party was officially abolished by the military government in 1992 without any justification.

"We agreed on the decision because it is a reflection of our people's desire. Our Arakanese people strongly believe the election along with the 2008 constitution is not useful for the Arakanese people and it was constituted by the military government to oppress the Arakanese people continually," he said.

16 political parties had registered with the Election Commission as of 9 April, but there are no Arakanese parties among them.

He added, "It is proof, because there are no parties representing Arakan. It is obvious the Arakanese people are not interested in the election."

According to local sources, however, some Arakanese politicians from Sittwe are now discussing the formation of a political party to run in the upcoming election.

One leader among them said, on condition of anonymity, "Now the ALD decided not to register and contest in the election. We may lose our rights in Burma without a political party. So we need a political party to represent our Arakanese people. Because of that, we are preparing to form a political party with the name 'Arakan Democratic Party'".

During the meeting of the ALD, U Tha Ban was elected as vice-president of the ALD, but two posts - president and general secretary - were not filled during the meeting. The two positions were left vacant after ALD Chairman U Soe Mra Aung and Secretary U Aye Pe passed away.

The two posts will be filled with suitable leaders at the next conference of the ALD, said sources.

[Chin political party registers for election](#)

Khonumthung News - 9 April 2010

The Chin National Party (CNP), set up by Chin political leaders, has registered with the Election Commission on 7 April for the forthcoming 2010 general elections in Burma.

This follows a discussion by Chin political leaders in Yangon city and representatives of Chin people in all townships in Chin state. They have agreed to field candidates from one umbrella political party.

A number of Chin political leaders went to Naypitaw, capital of Burma on 29 March and registered their political party, the Chin National Party (CNP).

Khonumthung News tried to contact the leaders but there is no official word as to whom all will be nominated as candidates from among Chin politicians.

Till date, 13 parties have applied to contest in the election. Of these 11 political parties have already registered with the Election Commission to participate in the elections later this year.

Meanwhile, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said that the Election Commission has announced the formation of state and division sub-commissions for the election. Sub-commission offices will be opened in the respective state and division General Administration Department offices.

However, the date of the election is yet to be announced, although the junta has announced its electoral laws on 8 March.

[Zomi MP barred from meeting Chin people](#)

Khonumthung News - 12 April 2010

Months before the general elections in Burma seem to be scheduled the military junta is bent on placing hurdles in the way of some political parties.

In the second week of March, Mr. Cinsianthang, Zomi National Congress Member of Parliament (MP) from the 1990 elections visited Chin state from Yangon, but was not allowed to interact with Chin people.

The leader of the Zomi National Congress visited his 1990 constituency Tiddim to meet local people, but was prohibited by military authorities.

"The military intelligence is monitoring his movements and watching him closely, so he cannot meet other leaders of his party," said an eyewitness.

Mr. Cinsianthang is a member of the Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament (CRPP) and he was arrested by the military junta earlier.

"He just uttered one sentence to the local people that he was satisfied to show his face to them," said a local.

The Zomi National Congress had announced in its 21st anniversary press release that it would not participate in the forthcoming elections if the military junta did not review and revise the 2008 constitution.

9/04/2010

News

[Asean Leaders Urge Open Elections in Burma](#)

Irrawaddy - 9 April 2010

By Ben Stocking / AP Writer

HANOI — Southeast Asian leaders urged Burma's isolated military government to hold free and fair elections later this year and pledged Friday to enhance economic cooperation among themselves as they ended a regional summit.

"The elections should be free and democratic with the participation of all parties," said Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who chaired the 16th annual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Asean leaders did not issue a formal statement about Burma, but Dung stated the organization's position during a news conference after the summit.

Burma's military junta plans to call elections sometime this year, but under the election laws, detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi is forbidden from participating. Her party, the National League for Democracy, is boycotting the polls—the first in two decades, potentially undermining the credibility of the outcome.

The opposition won the 1990 elections, but the military refused to allow it to take power and has since tightly controlled political expression, jailing political activists—including Suu Kyi for 14 of the last 20 years—and quelling mass protests.

Speaking on the sidelines of the summit Friday morning, Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa said it was important for Burma to make the transition to democracy.

"We want very much to see an election that is going to obtain international recognition and credibility," he said.

Leaders from the 10 Asean nations represent widely diverging political systems—ranging from democracies to communism to a military junta—and generally refrain from commenting on one another's political affairs.

Representing his single-party communist state, Dung recently visited Burma to promote Vietnamese trade and investment there. He said he conveyed Asean's position on the elections to Prime Minister Thein Sein at that time.

"Asean countries reaffirm their continued support to Myanmar [Burma] in its active regional and international integration," Dung said Friday, when asked about Burma's election plans. "We are ready to support Myanmar if requested, under the spirit of the Asean charter."

Other leaders at the summit said that they needed to engage Burma, not isolate it.

"We are not in a position to punish Myanmar," said Indonesian Prime Minister George Yeo. "If China and India remain engaged with Myanmar, then we have to."

The summit took place amid an escalating political crisis in Thailand that forced Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to declare a state of emergency and cancel his trip to Hanoi. Thailand's "Red Shirt" protesters, who briefly occupied parliament this week, are generally supporters of former leader Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted in a 2006 coup, and want Abhisit to resign and call new elections.

Dung made no reference to Thailand's troubles during his post-summit news conference.

Dung said the Asean leaders had agreed to intensify their economic cooperation, with the goal of establishing a European-style economic community by 2015 and promoting development across the region.

They also agreed on a system for resolving disputes among member states and agreed to work together to address climate change.

Asean's foreign ministers predict that economic growth across the region could reach 5.5 percent this year and they said they would take steps to ensure financial stability.

The leaders issued a statement saying the global economy shows signs of recovery, although it would be slow.

"We believe Asean's inherent dynamism will help the region sustain its recovery and attain higher economic growth," the statement said.

[US Will Continue Burma Engagement Policy](#)

Irrawaddy – 9 April 2010

By Lalit K. Jha

Washington, D.C. —The Obama Administration said today it would continue its new policy of engaging the Burmese leadership despite the fact that the military junta has ignored, and often directly contradicted, the advice of the international community.

"We are engaging Burma," said P J Crowley, US Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. "Other countries in the region are engaging Burma, obviously, in a variety of contexts, including through Asean [The Association of Southeast Asian Nations]."

Crowley said the Obama Administration has been talking with India and China regarding Burma, but did not provide details.

"I think everybody has an interest in stability in the region, seeing Burma emerge from its isolation. But clearly, there are steps that Burma has to take, and we will continue our regional dialogue and encourage everyone to provide Burma the same message," Crowley said in response to a question.

The new US policy with respect to Burma, unveiled last year by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, includes engagement as well as sanctions.

The United States has had two rounds of talks with the Burmese military junta since the new policy was announced.

During that period, the Burmese government has continued to thumb its nose at the international community with respect to the release of political prisoners, freedom and fairness in the upcoming election, and human rights.

According to Crowley, no date has been set for the next round of talks.

Members of Asean are scheduled to discuss issues surrounding Burma at their 16th annual summit that opened today in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Even though the specter of a sham Burmese election without the participation of the main opposition party and its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, threatens to discredit the regional bloc and once again open Asean to criticism as a toothless organization, Asean is not expected to exert much pressure on the Burmese junta.

Singapore foreign minister George Yeo, speaking in Hanoi, seemed to sum up the fence-sitting stance of many Asean members.

"It's disappointing that, because of the way the election laws have been crafted, it's not possible for the NLD [National League for Democracy] to participate in the elections," Yeo said. But then he added: "We are not in a position to punish Myanmar [Burma]. If China and India remain engaged with Myanmar, then we have to."

Burma 'will remain rich, poor and controversial'

DVB - 9 April 2010

By Francis Wade

The Norwegian state secretary currently in Burma for high-level talks has said that the country remains "one of the world's most controversial...in the eyes of the international community".

Gry Larsen, who backs international engagement with the ruling junta, said in an article on 6 April prior to arriving in Burma that the international community should also "examine carefully" whether current policy to Burma "has in fact promoted greater openness and economic and democratic development".

The Norwegian government has been an open supporter, both financially and vocally, of Burma's pro-democracy movement, and is one of the leading funders for exiled media and rights groups.

It was also one of the first countries to open its borders to Burmese asylum seekers who fled the country following the infamous 1988 uprising.

Larsen's trip is a rare one for a representative of a country that openly supports Burmese opposition groups – the majority of foreign dignitaries that visit Burma are from the handful of countries still allied with the ruling regime.

Observers have said however that the apparent relaxing of restrictions on visits by overseas envoys, notably the two senior-level US delegations that visited Burma last year, could be an show of legitimacy by the junta in the run-up to elections this year.

During Larsen's meetings with government officials and pro-democracy representatives, Larsen said that she "will focus on the opportunities for addressing poverty and increasing wealth". However she echoed condemnation by world leaders of the elections this year but added that Burma would be embraced by the international community if the junta moves "in the right direction".

"The Burmese authorities are at a crossroads. If they choose the way to democracy and growth, the international community will strengthen its political and economic cooperation with the country," she said.

"Burma will in all likelihood continue to be rich, poor and controversial. But it is within the country that its future will be decided. And the international community cannot refrain from engaging directly with those who are in the driving seat."

The US has recently expressed its anguish at the lack of progress made by the junta since Washington in September last year ditched its long-running isolation of Burma in favour of engagement.

Since September, the junta has locked up a US citizen on spurious charges, rejected several legal appeals to release Aung San Suu Kyi, and announced highly controversial election laws.

But it has said that it will continue dialogue with the ruling generals following two decades of disengagement that reaped few rewards.

[US govt sued by 'bugged' Burma drugs agent](#)

DVB - 8 April 2010

By Joseph Allchin

The US government has been ordered to pay \$US3 million to a former Rangoon-based Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officer who accused Washington of spying on him whilst in Burma.

Richard Horn, who was the most senior DEA officer in Burma at a time when the country dominated the world's heroin market, filed litigation in a federal court in 1994 in a case at the time described as 'sealed' for secrecy.

Last week judges approved an out-of-court settlement, 16 years after the case was first lodged, likely to prevent much of the information regarding the case coming out in court.

Although some details had leaked by 2004, the case was only 'unsealed' last year by the US justice department. Horn alleges that not only were his phone calls tapped but that he was immediately at loggerheads with US embassy charge d'affaires Franklin Huddle Jr., and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief of station in Burma at the time, Arthur M. Brown.

Horn said that Brown had tried to sabotage his job, which involved working with the Burmese government to eradicate the narcotics industry.

Horn reportedly became suspicious that he was being bugged when he returned to his Rangoon home to find his government-issued square table replaced with a round one, according to AP.

According to Horn's attorney, Brian Leighton, the DEA officer had made progress in working with the military government, a situation that countered Huddle and Brown's attempts to portray the junta in a wholly negative fashion.

After the 30 March ruling, Judge Lamberth was quoted by AP as saying: "Again, it does not appear that any government officials have been held accountable for this loss to the taxpayer. This is troubling to the court."

Lamberth asked US attorney general Eric Holder whether there would be an internal investigation after the government initially threw the case out, citing the State Secrets Privilege that can be invoked for "national security".

Holder announced in September that he would seek a rethink of State Secrets Privilege, an announcement that Lamberth applauded after working on the case.

Lamberth noted that there was "misconduct" by both the state department and CIA detailed in the sealed evidence and that the government deemed to counter national security.

The court found that "the allegations of wrongdoing by the government attorneys in this case are not only credible, they are admitted", and as a result Lamberth lamented the "misgivings" of the court that it had to end the case with a pay-out.

The DEA's regional office in Bangkok refused to comment, stating that it had a lack of authorisation to talk on the matter, while the press attaché claimed to not know of the case.

[NLD protests rejection of lawsuit against Than Shwe](#)

Mizzima - 8 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai – The National League for Democracy (NLD) has dispatched a protest note to the Chief Judge in the Central Court, which states rejection of the lawsuit against Senior General Than Shwe is unlawful, Nyan Win, one of the lawyers of Aung San Suu Kyi said today.

In keeping with the decision of the Central Executive Committee's meeting on March 22, signed by Chairman Aung Shwe, NLD filed the lawsuit against Senior General Than Shwe on March 23. However, an authorized person in the Rangoon Division Court rejected the lawsuit. He said that the court does not have the power to accept the case, and returned the documents to the party.

NLD sent the letter because rejection of the lawsuit according to sections 5(a) (h), (j) of 2000 Burma Judiciary Law and sections 45 and 54 of 1887 Specific Relief Act is not in accordance with the law.

"The court rejected the lawsuit which is against the law, so we sent the letter to the Chief Judge by post," NLD Central Executive Committee's member, lawyer Nyan Win said.

"The court does not have the right to reject the lawsuit. They should have formally recorded the reason for rejection. Rejecting the lawsuit without a formal record was unlawful," he added.

According to Nyan Win, when he met Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday, she pointed out that rejecting the lawsuit was unlawful and directed them to continue to take legal action.

[Ethnic Shan political party registers for elections](#)

SHAN - 8 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

A newly formed Shan political party, "the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) led by Sai Ai Pao, the former General Secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the second largest winning party in the whole of Burma and the top winning one in Shan State in the 1990 elections, has reportedly registered to contest in the upcoming general elections today.

"However, the party is not sure whether the junta will accept their registration or not," a Shan resident in Rangoon told SHAN.

The party was formed after a two day meeting held in Rangoon a few days ago by Shans from towns such as Namkham, Kyaukme, Rangoon, Mandalay, Taunggyi, Panglong, Mongkawng (Moegaung in Kachin State) aiming for the Shan people to have choices in the elections.

The party elected Sai Saung Si, former member of SNLD and elected representative of Kyaukme constituency No#2 in 1990, as Vice Chairman. The party also chose 15 people as CEC members.

"If there is no ethnic political party, and only has the junta backed party, then people won't have any choice but to choose the party they are offered," a Shan resident in Ragoon told SHAN. "Then, the junta will win the seats by acclamation."

Another party is the Union Democratic Alliance Organization (UDAO) formed by the veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn. It has already applied for registration for months. There are altogether 12 political parties that have registered for the elections, according to media reports.

For the SNLD, it will not contest until the party is allowed to discuss with its Chairman, Hkun Htun Oo, who is serving a 93 year jail sentence in Puta-O prison in Kachin State, according to party spokesman Sai Leik.

[Ethnic block to boycott Burma's elections](#)

Chinland Guardian - 8 April 2010

In a move that will further dent the credibility of Burma's planned elections later this year; the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) has announced on Wednesday they will not contest the polls.

A 12-member coalition, the UNA consists of some of the largest ethnic political parties that had contested and won a significant chunk of parliamentary seats in the 1990 elections.

The ethnic coalition said in a statement yesterday it has taken the decision not to collectively re-register the parties for the elections in light of the regime's continued failure to respond positively to its demands, one of which includes the review of the 2008 constitution. The move is expected to deal further blows to the credibility of the junta's upcoming elections.

"We have made appeals to the State Peace and Development Council to act on the recommendations of the United Nations towards achieving national reconciliation, the essential steps for which include the unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and U Khun Htun Oo; the initiation of a tripartite dialogue; and the review of anti-democratic provisions contained in the 2008 constitution," the UNA statement says.

"Our views are fully consistent with the March 29 Central Committee decision of the National League for Democracy regarding the upcoming elections." Suu Kyi's NLD party has already refused to participate in the elections due to the unfair electoral laws.

Meanwhile, Rangoon-based publication the Voice Weekly has reported that as of 6 April 10 new political parties have registered with the Election Commission.

The United Nationalities Alliance is made up of Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Arakan People's Democratic Front (APDF), Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD), Zomi National Congress (ZNC) Kayin National Congress for Democracy (KNCD), Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKDP), Kachin State National Congress for Democracy (KSNCD), Mara People Party (MPP), Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy (KSANLD), and Kayan National Unity and Democratic Organization (KNUDO).

[Chin political party registers for election](#)

Khonumthung News - 9 April 2010

The Chin National Party (CNP), set up by Chin political leaders, has registered with the Election Commission on 7 April for the forthcoming 2010 general elections in Burma.

This follows a discussion by Chin political leaders in Yangon city and representatives of Chin people in all townships in Chin state. They have agreed to field candidates from one umbrella political party.

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Meanwhile, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said that the Election Commission has announced the formation of state and division sub-commissions for the election. Sub-commission offices will be opened in the respective state and division General Administration Department offices.

However, the date of the election is yet to be announced, although the junta has announced its electoral laws on 8 March. -

[Wa top leader welcomes UN, INGO returnees](#)

SHAN - 8 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

The United Wa State Army (UWSA)'s Vice Chairman Xiao Minliang reportedly welcomed and met the returnees of international organizations: UN and INGOs on 6 April at its headquarters in Panghsang, to resume their work in the Wa territory, according to a report received by SHAN.

The meeting was attended by only the UN and INGO staffs, not the Nataka (junta personnel) and Burma Army officers.

In mid March, the military junta had ordered all junta personnel and NGOs working in the Wa State to return to their home bases. According to the Wa statistics, there were more than 300 junta personnel who had left.

Xiao expressed his appreciation of the agencies to continue their assistance and support to the poor people in the Wa areas again. He then explained the current political circumstances between the group and the Burma Army authorities, until it had led the agencies to face difficulties and limited access.

“The Wa authorities were embarrassed by the difficulties and limited access faced by international agencies due to the current political circumstances but Wa will actively support the agencies,” the report quoted him as saying.

According to him, relationships between Wa and the military junta had been good over the past 20 years until Naypyitaw’s Border Guard Force (BGF) program was introduced in April 2009. Since then the relationship between the two had changed because the two did not share the same visions on the BGF.

Both have been meeting several times to discuss the program, but there is as yet no satisfactory resolution for the two.

Xiao said, “Previously the Wa thought that differences were a normal process and they could be resolved. Unfortunately, the problem was not solved and was also delayed by the Kokang crisis in August 2009, up till now.”

The last meeting of the two sides was on 1 April, held in Tangyan, west of the Wa capital Panghsang, when the Burma Army set 22 April as the latest deadline for the group to inform Naypyitaw over the BGF. If the group fails to comply, the relationship will return to the pre 1989 situation. The deadline has also been given to other ethnic ceasefire groups that still refuse to accept the program like National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) known as Mongla group, Shan State Army (SSA) ‘North’ and Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

On 3 April (and not 1 April as reported earlier), the Wa reportedly sent their new 8-point counterproposal, to General Thura Shwe Man, Lt General Ye Myint and Major Aung Than Htut, Commander of the Northeastern Region Command.

Xiao said the new proposal had been made with a view to maintain regional stability. “While the Government of the Union of Myanmar (GOUM) is taking into account of state interest, Wa interest should also be taken into consideration. Because the Wa has never refused to accept BGF and expectation from Wa is mutual understanding between the two parties. Wa will stick to the following principles:

- Wa does not want to have armed conflict with GOUM and Wa will stick to the principle of peace
- Wa will never try to disintegrate from the Union in any circumstances
- Wa will be in support of up coming general elections, which are expected to be free and fair
- Wa will continue to support the existing GOUM and will be under leadership of newly elected GOUM.”

[Rohingya minority given ID cards](#)

DVB - 9 April 2010

By Aye Nai

Identity cards are being issued to Burma’s Rohingya minority in the west of the country in a move likely aimed at securing votes prior to elections.

But the government’s decision to categorise the Rohingya as “Burmese Muslims”, and not Rohingya. has inflamed locals in Arakan state who claim it will only heighten racial tension.

“They are doing this to make sure that they get votes for 2010,” said a local in Arakan state. “It is rather thought provoking that they are giving the ‘Burmese Muslim’ [status] in this election as they had never thought of doing this in the past. This could cause racial problems in the future.”

He added that the issuance appeared “not in accordance with immigration rules and regulations” – Arakan citizens had never before been given identity cards.

A member of staff at the Arakan state immigration office however denied that the cards have been issued, but said that the office head had gone to the capital Naypyidaw for a meeting, although didn’t elaborate on what was being discussed.

Chris Lewa, head of the Arakan Project, said that a Rohingya representative had also travelled to Naypyidaw in the past week to discuss the ID card issue.

She added that there had been “promises by ministers when they visited Arakan state last month that [the Rohingya] will soon get a full citizenship card”. Many already hold temporary cards.

“Because of the referendum the authorities are keen to give them temporary ID cards – the elections laws stipulate that temporary cardholders can vote,” she said.

“The majority of Rohingya in Rangoon have full citizenship and the government is choosing [Rohingya] businessmen with close ties to the ruling junta to go to Arakan state and give donations to the people,” she continued. “It seems that these people will stand as candidates for the government, in the [junta proxy Union Solidarity and Development Association] for example, in the elections.”

A native Arakan said that the practice also occurred during the rule of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL), the main political party in Burma between 1945 and 1962, when authorities promised foreign residents national identity cards to secure their votes.

“Successive military governments tended to make profits from illegal residents or ‘guests’ – nationals, foreigners, Chinese and Indians during the elections,” he said.

The issuing of identity cards to the Rohingya came after UN rapporteur to Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, said in his report to the UN that the Burmese government has been persecuting Muslims.

Up to 400,000 Rohingya are living in dire conditions across the border in Bangladesh, having fled persecution in Burma. Only 23,000 of these however have been granted refugee status by the UN, while the majority live in makeshift refugee camps.

[**Saudi Arabia and US support Burmese refugees in Bangladesh**](#)

Kaladan Press - 8 April 2010

By Tin Soe

Chittagong, Bangladesh: Dr Abdullah Bin Naser Al-Busairi, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh, handed over a cheque of Taka 3.509 million to the UNHCR Bangladesh representative Craig Sanders in his office on April 5.

Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance for supply of food grains and other essential commodities to the Burmese refugees in Bangladesh in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), according to a press release from Saudi embassy.

The US Department of State posted on its website an urgent proposal; “Current Funding Priorities for Assistance to Burmese Rohingya in Bangladesh,” which mentions that to promote a holistic, district-wide approach to both registered Rohingya refugees living inside the two official refugee camps, Kutupalong and Nayapara, and unregistered Rohingya and local Bangladeshi host population living outside the camps will be prioritized above other project proposals submitted in response to this Funding Opportunity Announcement.

The proposals for Araknese Rohingya refugee are:

(1) Proposed activities in the two official refugee camps, Kutupalong and Nayapara, should support the following priority sectors:

a. Expand skills training to include income generating activities, with an emphasis on the development of skills and vocational training to achieve a measure of self-sufficiency and a reasonable livelihood;

- b. Strengthen ongoing healthcare (including reproductive health), education services, and psychosocial programming, particularly through integrating and expanding support to the disabled;
- c. Expand community mobilization programmes, especially in support of the existing community-based counseling system for conflict resolution;
- d. Improve physical infrastructure in the camps, including shelter and interior roads; and
- e. Improve knowledge of and enhance the capacity to identify and respond to GBV, and build the capacity of service providers to incorporate GBV prevention and response into their activities.

(2) Proposals that incorporate unregistered Rohingya living outside of the two official camps, Kutupalong and Nayapara, should link the above priority sectors with the following activities:

- a. Expand access to justice by strengthening law and order in the sub-districts where the camps are located, specifically to combat GBV and support survivors; and
- b. Expand access to education for refugee children that would serve both Rohingya and Bangladeshi students, where Rohingya make up 50 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries.

When asked refugees said, "it is good news as we can give our children education, but we are not sure whether the programmes will be implemented."

"We thank Saudi Arabia and US for helping us and arranging a programme to save our children and us in the camp," said a woman from the unregistered refugee camp of Kutupalong.

[Double wages for workers on duty during Thingyan](#)

Mizzima - 9 April 2010

By Salai Hanthar San

New Delhi – In a decision, which favours the working class, a rarity in Burma, the Labour Ministry has ordered factory managements and business houses this week to pay workers double the wages if they open their establishment during the four-day long Thingyan (water festival).

The ministry has ordered the management to let workers enjoy the Thingyan festival from April 13 to 16. Should they wish to keep their establishments open on these days, they must inform the ministry.

"All factories and businesses are ordered to close during Thingyan festival. If the factories have to be run on these days, they must inform the labour office in advance and pay workers double wages," an official from North Dagon Township Labour Office told Mizzima.

"We have been ordered to take action against those who do not inform us in advance but we don't know yet what action to take," he said.

The Factories and Labour Law Inspection Department under the Labour Ministry issued the order this year under the 1951 Leave and Holiday Act. The order will cover all factories, establishments, companies, stores, and restaurants.

Some factory managements in Hlaing Tharyar, South Dagon, North Dagon and Shwe Pyitha industrial zones, said that it was announced that the holidays will be the same as government holidays and the workers will be paid in full during the holidays.

"Our factory will close in keeping with government holidays and there will be no wage cut. We are happy to get fully paid holidays," a woman worker in a textile factory in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone 2 said.

Government holidays in this year's Thingyan festival are from April 10 to 21.

"We have never before heard of such an order for paying double wages for holidays. It will be the first time ever," a reporter in a Rangoon based weekly journal said.

The order might have been issued because of a series of labour strikes in Rangoon industrial zones early this year, he added.

Despite the order issued in Rangoon by the ministry, some businessmen in Mandalay said that they had not yet received such a directive.

“Our factory has not yet received any directive. We will not close in keeping with government holidays but we will close for four days during the Thingyan festival,” a bean crushing factory owner in Pyi Gyi Tagon Township said.

Thousands of workers from Shwe Pyi Thar, Insein, Hlaing Tharyar, South Dagon industrial zones in Rangoon Division staged at least 10 labour strikes in February and March this year demanding increased wages and reduced working hours.

[Displaced children endure trauma, violent death, disease: report](#)

Mizzima - 8 April 2010

By Larry Jagan

Bangkok - Every day Burma's ethnic minority children face forced relocation, forced labour for the army, starvation, disease and death, according to a report by humanitarian groups released on Wednesday.

These children are acutely vulnerable when they are forced to flee their homes, the report by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR), a Christian group that helps refugees inside Burma, and Christian aid agency Partners Relief and Development says.

One child in five displaced by the fighting dies from disease or starvation before they reach the age of two, Amanda Carrol, a project manager at Partners, told Mizzima.

“If we do nothing now to stop this, there is an extreme risk that the next generation of Burmese ethnic children won't survive their teens,” she said.

Children are increasingly at risk now that the Burmese army is continuing its low-intensity assault against the Karen in eastern Burma, according to the report “Displaced Childhoods”, which has chronicled the children's suffering in the conflict areas in eastern Burma since July 2002.

In the continuing military conflict, children's lives are scarred by death and destruction at the hands of Burmese junta troops, according to the report. “Children as young as 10 have to carry supplies for the Burmese troops,” Steve Gumaer, who co-founded Partners with his wife, Oddny, said. Hundreds die from starvation, disease or are simply shot by Burmese soldiers.

The report testifies to the atrocities these ethnic children face daily as a matter of course. In one village, a seven-year-old girl was raped and killed by Burmese troops. In another a 13-year-old boy was blinded by a landmine – planted by the Burmese army – that blew up in his face.

Even when they are provided makeshift shelter in the camps set up by the junta, the ethnic “refugees” are far from safe. “In the relocation site, SPDC soldiers often beat and kicked the villagers,” said a Karenni parent with four children, who spent seven years at a relocation site and was interviewed for the report. “There isn't the normal kind of stability you need for your family to be safe. We often heard gunshots ... as there was a lot of fighting between the SPDC and rebel groups.”

Forced labour, abductions, dislocation and summary executions are continuing, Monkey, a Karen team leader with the FBR, said. In one attack in January on several villages in Karen State, three villagers were killed and most of the homes were burned down. More than a thousand people were forced to flee, many of them children. With nothing but the clothes on their backs, these people are facing certain malnourishment and disease, and in some cases they will not survive.

Since the beginning of the year, Burmese military operations have forced more than 3,000 villagers to flee their homes. More than 30,000 have fled in the past two years. “Almost everyone in the eastern areas of Karen State has had to flee for their lives in the past forty years,” FBR director David Eubank said. “It's a huge human tragedy,” he added. Two out of every three displaced Karen are children.

Last year, more than 110,000 villagers in eastern Burma were displaced directly or indirectly through Burmese military actions, the report says. In the same area, between 2002 and the end of last year, nearly 600,000 civilians, most of them children, were forcibly evicted from their homes.

While the situation is worst in eastern Burma, where the Karen National Union continues to fight for autonomy, in most minority areas where conflict continues, civilians are facing similar conditions. Up to three million people are estimated to have been forced to flee and live in hiding or relocation camps – known as internally displaced persons (IDPs) – throughout Burma, according to the report.

“The situation is so appalling that we were compelled to compile this report and bring it to the attention of the international community,” Mr Gumaer said, adding, “In effect, we are giving these children a voice as well as highlighting their plight.”

The Partners and FBR teams collected information from 200 affected people – through community-based surveys and interviews. More than 80 in-depth interviews were also carried along the Thai-Burmese border between last June and December. The interviews included parents, grandparents and children from Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan states in junta-designated relocation sites, in ceasefire areas and in hiding. The FBR teams surveyed more than 90 people from ethnic Karen and Shan communities, nearly half of them children, in the second half of last year.

Ethnic minority villagers living in conflict areas along Burma’s borders are frequently forced to flee homes, farms and villages with little warning. They are then exposed to further rights abuses – torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape and sexual violence, forced labour and use as porters by the military, and extrajudicial killings.

At the very least, children witness these atrocities, but are also frequently the victims. Children also face recruitment as child soldiers. Whether in hiding or at relocation camps, they are denied access to adequate schooling and health care.

“This is intolerable and cannot be allowed to continue,” Ms Carrol said. “The international community must sit up and take notice – the situation of these ethnic children contravenes even Burma’s own laws.”

The organisations responsible for the report, Partners and FBR, are joining calls for a formal investigation through a UN commission of inquiry to evaluate all the allegations of international crimes committed against Burma’s civilian population, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“It’s time for us all to stand up and be counted,” Ms Carrol said. “Otherwise a whole generation of ethnic children could perish.”

Report: [*Displaced Childhoods: Human Rights & International Crimes against Burma’s Internally Displaced Children*](#) - April 2010

8/04/2010

News

[Strident demand from 100 ASEAN MPs to expel Burma](#)

Mizzima - 7 April 2010

Chiang Mai - On the eve of the ASEAN summit in Vietnam, there is a strident demand from over 100 ASEAN Members of Parliament to expel Burma from ASEAN and impose sanctions because the junta has clearly ignored the plea to conduct free and fair elections, with the announcement of its harsh electoral laws.

“ASEAN leaders due to attend the summit in Hanoi, Vietnam on Thursday and Friday should make a forceful demand to the junta to make the forthcoming elections in Burma free and fair,” the MPs said.

About 105 MPs from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Singapore sent the statement to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC). The statement lambasted the junta’s harsh and convoluted electoral laws, which bar Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners from participating in the elections.

The National League for Democracy, Burma’s main opposition party has decided not to re-register the party with the Election Commission. If the party wanted to contest the election, it had to expel members,

who are in prison, including party leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Clearly party members, who took the decision not to re-register, unanimously, were not in favour of taking the drastic step of expelling the democracy icon.

“With the one-sided electoral laws, clearly aimed at preventing opposition parties and candidates from contesting the elections, the regime has forfeited its best opportunity to show its willingness to engage in an inclusive process of national reconciliation and the establishment of a lawful and democratic government for the Union of Myanmar,” the statement said.

“The junta has ignored ASEAN’s demands, so, ASEAN should consider a more effective strategy,” the MPs said. “ASEAN should impose tight targeted sanctions on Burma,” they added.

The statement also said that Burma has always ignored the policies in the new ASEAN Charter, so ASEAN members should consider expelling Burma from ASEAN.

ASEAN cannot take action on Burma because of its policy of non-interference.

However, some ASEAN members have separately criticised the junta’s electoral laws and called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

[Amnesty calls Asean to task over Burma abuses](#)

Mizzima - 8 April 2010

Amnesty International urged regional leaders to address immediately Burma’s violation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) human rights charter, joining the chorus of regional lawmakers critical of the Burmese regime on the eve of the bloc’s summit in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi.

Donna Guest, Amnesty’s deputy Asia programme director, on Wednesday said: “It is clear that Myanmar [Burma] has been seriously and systematically breaching the Asean charter’s human rights provisions. It is now up to the summit, under its new chair Vietnam, to address this breach as a matter of urgency.”

The rights group’s call came as leaders of Asean member countries, including Burma, were gathering in Hanoi, Vietnam, for the bloc’s 16th summit on Thursday and Friday.

With continued but increasing repression of activists, ethnic minorities and political dissidents, Burma’s human rights record was worsening, Amnesty said.

Burma’s military government has laid the ground work to continue such repression with its enactment of electoral laws that bar thousands of people, including detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, from participating in the upcoming election.

“Asean’s reputation as a meaningful regional forum will suffer if it does not call for Myanmar to respect freedom of expression, assembly and association in the lead-up to the election,” Guest said.

With the Asean charter’s article 20 (4) stating, “In the case of a serious breach of the Charter or non-compliance, the matter shall be referred to the Asean Summit for decision,” the 10-member bloc must press Burma to halt the increasing repression of activists, particularly from the country’s large ethnic minority community, Amnesty said.

Asean must also call on Burma to free Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners, estimated at 2,200, and deliver free, fair and inclusive elections this year, Amnesty said.

“This summit is an opportunity for Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia to continue their demands for Myanmar [Burma] to improve its human rights record,” Guest said, adding that: “The Asean summit’s final statement should include a clear condemnation of Myanmar’s [Burma’s] human rights record.”

Burma is a member state to the bloc along with Indonesia, Cambodia, Brunei, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Often, the group faces international criticism for the appalling rights violations in its member country, Burma.

Aside from the section of the Asean charter highlighted by Amnesty, the preamble to the document sets out the bloc's founding ideals, one of which says it values: "Adhering to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Amnesty's statement echoes that of 105 parliamentarians from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Singapore, who have called on the summit "to urgently discuss the dire need for actionable and meaningful solutions to the political and human rights problems currently plaguing Myanmar [Burma]". On Wednesday the lawmakers issued a press statement calling on the forum to seriously consider the situation in Burma and to take significant action, such as suspending the country from the grouping.

Burma Should Top Asean Agenda: Rights Groups

Irrawaddy – 7 April 2010

By Saw Yan Naing

International and regional rights groups and activists want the representatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to prioritize Burma's political crisis during the regional summit in Hanoi on April 8-9.

London-based international rights group Amnesty International released a statement on Wednesday saying that the Burma issue should be at the top of the agenda for Asean leaders in Hanoi as Burma's human rights record is a serious breach of the Asean Charter.

A regional rights group, the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), released a press advisory on Wednesday to Asean leaders to take urgent and tough action on Burma to obtain a clear and tangible commitment for a free and fair election. The petition was signed by 105 legislators from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and Singapore.

The press advisory also called on the summit to urgently raise and discuss the dire need for action and meaningful solutions to the political and human rights problems currently plaguing Burma.

Donna Guest, the deputy Asia Programme Director for Amnesty International, said in the statement: "It is clear that Myanmar [Burma] has been seriously and systematically breaching the Asean Charter's human rights provisions. It is now up to the summit, under its new chair Vietnam, to address this breach as a matter of urgency.

"Asean's reputation as a meaningful regional forum will suffer if it does not call for Myanmar to respect freedom of expression, assembly and association in the lead-up to the election," she added.

Burma's election laws, issued by the Burmese military regime in March, effectively bar at least 2,200 political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize winner and main opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, from participating in this year's election.

The Asean legislators who signed the petition have also voiced their grave concern over the expected general election and urged Vietnam, as the current Asean Chair, to raise and solve the issue of Burma's failure to assure free, fair and inclusive elections in the country.

The Burma election laws had earlier drawn criticism from the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines, and resulted in Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, opting out of the process.

"This summit is an opportunity for Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia to continue their demands for Myanmar to improve its human rights record," said Guest.

Amnesty International also called on all 10 of Asean's member states to keep pressing Burma to stop repressing dissidents and desist from committing widespread human rights abuses, especially in ethnic minority communities.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo has said he will urge Asean members at the summit to call for a reversal of Burma's electoral laws, which he said contravene the junta's promises to embark on a "road map to democracy," according to a report by *Agence France-Presse*.

According to a Jakarta Post report quoting Indonesia's Foreign Ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah on Monday: "Indonesia will address the issue of Myanmar at the summit and voice concerns over the urgency to ensure that the upcoming elections in Myanmar will be inclusive."

Rafendi Djamin, the Indonesian commissioner for the Asean Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights, pointed out in *The Jakarta Post* that Asean's new "dispute settlement mechanism" (DSM) will increase the pressure for Burma to uphold its human rights commitment ahead of the election.

The DSM, which will be signed by the 10 Asean member states at the 16th Asean Summit in the Vietnamese capital, allows members disputing the implementation of the Asean Charter to take in a third party to help them solve differences, according to the report.

The DSM allows for four options—mediation, conciliation, good offices and arbitrary measures—in order to handle disputes arising from different interpretations of the Asean Charter implementation.

Human rights abuses are said to be the provision in the Charter that is most susceptible to disputes.

"There are many ways to intervene in Asean affairs," Jusuf Wanandi, a member of the board of directors at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, reportedly told *The Jakarta Post*.

"But the question is: how willing are we to undergo the intervention? Because mostly it is civil groups, and not so much the government, that is pushing for reform in Myanmar," said Wanandi.

Some observers believe that communist-ruled Vietnam will not strongly push Burma, as the host country can be criticized for its own flawed policies on rights and democracy.

During Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visit to Burma recently, the two countries promoted their relationship and trade deals. Dung signed seven contracts and joint agreements on investment promotion and several economic sectors, including finance, communication, agriculture and mines.

Vietnam has said it will not allow Burmese civil society groups, including Burmese dissidents in exile, to attend the Asean sideline meetings as Thailand did last year.

[Belarus in Burma for arms talks](#)

DVB - 8 April 2010

By Joseph Allchin

The Burmese junta is saddling up to another questionable regime this week as a delegation from the government of Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko arrives in Naypyidaw.

The landlocked former Soviet republic has been heavily censured because of political 'irregularities' by the country's self confessed 'authoritarian' leader, Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power, despite various controversial elections, since 1994.

Belarus is considered the only non-democracy in Europe and is the only country on the continent to still practice the death penalty.

The high-level delegation led by Raman Halowchanka, first deputy head of the state military and technical committee, arrived on 5 April on a four-day visit to take part in the second meeting of a 'Belarus-Myanmar [Burma] commission on military and technical cooperation', committee spokesperson Uladzimir Lawranyuk told the Belarusian news agency, Belapan.

The first meeting of the said committee took place in June last year in the Belarus capital, Minsk. The Belarus delegation is looking to secure defence contracts from the generals in Burma.

"Belarus has established military and technical ties in recent years," the spokesperson said. "And although foreign currency revenues from contracts with this state remain insignificant, there are certain prospects for the development of cooperation in the military and technical sphere."

The Burmese government receives arms primarily from China, Russia, Singapore, Ukraine, Israel and Serbia. The military however consumes around 40 percent of the government's budget, despite the fact

that Burma is considered one of the poorest countries in Asia, with over 35 percent of children not receiving a sufficient diet.

In December last year, Russia delivered 20 MiG-29 fighter planes to Burma at a cost of \$US570 million. Critics of junta have questioned the motives behind its myopic focus on the military, given that it currently has no external enemies.

A number of world leaders, including Britain's prime minister, Gordon Brown, and the East Timor leader Dr Jose Ramos-Horta, have called for a global arm embargo on Burma.

Czech Republic Supports UN War Crimes Inquiry on Burma

Irrawaddy – 8 April 2010

By Simon Roughneen

BANGKOK—The Czech Republic has become the third country to back the recommendation made by UN human rights Special Rapporteur on Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, that the UN Security Council examine setting up a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

In a statement to *The Irrawaddy*, the Czech foreign ministry said, "We believe that the possibility of establishing a Commission of Inquiry should be seriously examined."

"Political repression and military attacks against civilians of ethnic nationalities continue in scale and gravity that may entail international crimes under the terms of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," the statement said.

The statement added that it "remains concerned at continuous grave human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar" and questioned the efficacy of the regime's "road map to democracy."

Meanwhile former Czech President Vaclav Havel, an outspoken and prominent supporter of Aung San Suu Kyi, released a statement that referred to a report titled "*Displaced Childhoods*," by the Thai-Burmese border-based Free Burma Rangers (FBR) and its partners on Wednesday that reported that children's lives are scarred by death, destruction, loss and neglect at the hands of Burmese junta troops in eastern Burma.

"I am appalled by the brutality with which Burmese authorities treat their own citizens with impunity, and I am truly afraid that the situation might get even worse and these attacks escalate later this year when the junta prepares for the elections, the results of which are to be determined by them, not by the people."

In his message, Havel said, "The people of Burma still suffer today, and it is our duty to stand by the oppressed. I hope that democracy in Burma will be restored, that the ethnic people will have a stake in the political future of Burma, and that children can lead free, full lives."

Welcoming the news, Mark Farmaner, the director of the Burma UK Campaign, said "real momentum" is gathering behind the call for a commission of inquiry.

The Czech declaration makes it the third country to support Mr Ojea Quintana's recommendation, after Australia and the United Kingdom. The US said that it is "looking closely" at Quintana's recommendations, according to a statement by political counselor George Kent in Bangkok.

The Czech statement came just days after the National League for Democracy, Burma's most influential political party, refused to register for the elections scheduled in Burma sometime in 2010.

Rather than have "fake elections legalize his dictatorship," said Farmaner, referring to junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe, this year is "turning into the year when the international community woke up to the fact that he is criminal and should be behind bars."

Four More Groups Apply for Party Registration?

Irrawaddy – 7 April 2010

By Ko Htwe

Four more political parties submitted applications on Monday and Tuesday to the Union Election Commission to take part in the national election later this year.

A total of 11 parties have applied to register to contest in the election so far.

Two parties, the Difference and Peace Party (DPP) and the New Era People's Party (NEPP), submitted applications on Tuesday, and the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) and the Myanmar New Society Democratic Party, submitted applications on Monday, according to the *New Light of Myanmar*, a state-run newspaper.

Tun Aung Kyaw, the chairman of NEPP, told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday the party supports "industrial capitalism," a market economy and democracy.

"Under industry and capitalism, workers and farmers can develop," he said.

He said the NEPP will contest mainly in Irrawaddy, Rangoon, Thanintharyi, Mandalay and Sagaing divisions and in Arakan State, where he said the party has up to 200,000 members.

Funds for the party will be raised by monthly member dues, donations from businesses and individuals and by establishing a party-run business.

Tun Aung Kyaw was as personal assistant to Thakhin Soe for nearly nine years. One of the founders of the Communist Party of Burma in 1939, Thakhin Soe spent most of his life underground and for a time led the Trotskyite Red Flag branch of the party.

In the 1990 election, Tun Aung Kyaw was general secretary of the Unity and Development Party. He has written articles on the economy and articles opposing economic sanctions by the United States that were published in state-run newspapers under the pseudonym Aung Moe San and Tun Aung Kyaw (Munaung).

The deputy chairman of the DPP, Tin Maung Aye, told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday: "Our party's political ideology is humanist-democratic-nationalism, which means we won't turn a blind eye to the interest of people around the world. We will work with international groups, and we will serve tax-paying citizens."

The DPP will contest across the country and seek public donations. The party flag includes a blue background with a white star.

The KSPP chairman, Tu Jar, said the party will contest in all constituencies across Kachin State. Party members number nearly 3,000, he said.

"We support a multi-party process for the emergence of democracy," he said. "We want to develop our region."

Tu Ja, the former vice chairman of the ethnic Kachin cease-fire group, the Kachin Independence Organization, formed the KSPP in March last year and officially introduced the party in July 2009.

Three ethnic political parties, the Pa-O National Organization (PNO), the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) and the Kayin People's Party (KPP), have applied to register so far.

The KPP is led by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the PNO is led by Aung Kham Hti; and the KSPP is led by Dr. Tu Jar.

Earlier, the National Unity Party (NUP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF), the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM), the National Political Alliance (NPA) also applied to register.

The NUP is led by Tun Yi, the former deputy commander in chief of Burma's armed force; the DP is led by veteran Burmese politician Thu Wai; and the NPA is led by Ohn Lwin, a Rangoon-based politician who was a candidate in 1990 election.

The UMNPF is led by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising, and the GSUM is led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin; the Difference and Peace Party is led by Nyo Min Lwin and the New Era People party is led by Tun Aung Kyaw.

[\[Read here the list of the political parties that have registered for this year's election.\]](#)

Burma Army setting up more barriers against Wa

SHAN - 7 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

Burma' ruling military junta has reportedly been erecting barriers more densely than ever against ethnic ceasefire groups, especially in the United Wa State Army (UWSA) as the latest deadline 22 April draws near, according to local sources from the Thai-Burma border.

The activities reportedly started on 27 March, Armed Forces Day. Between Tachilek and Monghsat, a distance of 63 miles, there are no less than 20 Burma Army checkpoints, a local source in Monghsat said. "It is to monitor Wa's movements."

At the same time, Tachilek authorities are also vigorously conducting inspection of the people in the town for a week. They have been checking from house to house including hotels and apartments from 22:00 until dawn, said a Tachilek resident.

"They asked many questions. They checked our ID cards and questioned whether our cards are real or not. Some people staying in apartments got thorough inspection including their bedrooms," she said. "We don't know why they are so serious."

In addition, rumor is around that Naypyitaw is deploying three more Light Infantry Divisions (LIDs): Kalaw based LID #55, Pegu based LID #77 and Pa-an based LID#22 to the areas very soon. Tachilek area commander Colonel Khin Maung Soe himself was reported to have left the town to oversee the preparations.

The situation seems if the Wa is still standing defiant to the Naypyitaw's Border Guard Force program, a breakout of hostilities after 28 April is possible, a border watcher said.

The UWSA and other ceasefire groups have been given a 22 April deadline to accept the Burma Army's demand, and to face the consequences of their continued defiance by 28 April, when they would be declared as illegal organizations.

According to a source close to the UWSA southern military region, the ruling military junta should accept the Wa's latest counter proposal submitted on 1 April.

"In the past, we said there should be no junta officers at the battalion level," he said. "But now we are allowing it to have one officer to serve either as a commander or deputy commander at the battalion level."

Lead Poisoning Scare in Mergui

Irrawaddy - 8 April 2010

A senior official at the Ministry of Health in Tenasserim Division recently ordered medical staff at hospitals and clinics not to test for lead poisoning in patients' blood in Mergui Township, an important trading center in the southern part of Burma.

According to local doctors and health workers, the assistant director of the health department gave the order because "lead poisoning is seriously high in Myeik [Mergui]."

A doctor, whose two children were suffering from lead poisoning, told *The Irrawaddy* that he has been waiting the results of blood tests for his children. "A medical official in Myeik told me that the medical research department will not let me know the actual results because the officials from the Ministry of Health don't want the public to know how much lead is contained in the water we drink."

According to the sources, many local people have expressed desire to measure the lead levels in their blood recently because they suspect the lead content is high in the local drinking water—even local purified water for sale in Mergui.

Most of the water sources in the city are artesian wells. Around the city, there are several tin mines, some of which are no longer in use.

Health workers say that children are more vulnerable to lead poisoning and that at least three children died in Mergui in 2009 from lead poisoning and one child in March this year.

“Normally, people go to local hospitals and clinics,” said a health worker in Mergui. “But we have few facilities and drugs, so doctors refer them to Rangoon Children’s Hospital.”

Many locals in Mergui are apparently questioning why the government’s medical research department is unwilling to give out the results of blood tests.

Local health workers said they suspect that the soil in Mergui could be high in lead, because there are several nearby not only mines, but also seafood industries using chemicals and dyes that contain lead.

Opinion / Analysis

CONTRIBUTOR: New Beginning for the Opposition – By Dr. Zarni

Irrawaddy – 8 April 2010

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) colleagues have effectively diminished the credibility of the military generals’ election in Burma by refusing to register the party under unjust election laws.

At the same time, the regime’s Asian friends such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) are also widely expected to endorse the outcome of the election, with Asean Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan euphemistically framing the charade as “a new beginning.”

Negative reactions—from the *Economist* to *The New Yorker*, from *Reuters* to the *Christian Science Monitor*—should dishearten neither the NLD rank and file nor their worldwide supporters. For not a single commentary or news article appears to be informed by the mechanics and history of social movements.

Nor does the general media coverage and commentary appreciate the hardcore reality on the ground that nothing short of system implosion will bring hope and possibilities for a real new beginning for the Burmese people. Some authoritarian and/or near totalitarian systems are just beyond gradual reform.

The NLD’s decision to, in effect, dissolve itself as a “legal” entity is actually a brilliant strategic move from an organizer’s perspective, not a vain moral statement as many self-styled pundits on Burma have wrongly asserted.

A political movement which aims to attack the foundations of the very same repressive system needs no “legal” recognition by Burma’s de facto regime, not when the latter has been hell-bent on obliterating it by any means necessary.

Had the NLD decided to comply, if only grudgingly, with the regime’s registration ultimatum it would not only have let down the 2,000 plus dissidents behind bars who continue to resist the regime, it would also have deprived the party itself of the power to inspire future waves of activists and mobilize public and international support.

To belabor the obvious, the regime-certified NLD has long been paralyzed as a political party operating at the whim of the regime, with the sole operational office in its decrepit headquarters in downtown Rangoon: the military regime has sealed off numerous NLD local offices across the country, while jailing hundreds of competent NLD operatives and organizers, as well as able leaders and forcing others into exile.

In fact, the NLD operating as a “legal” party with one office in the country has made the regime’s surveillance exceedingly easy. All that the spooks need to do to intimidate party members is station themselves outside NLD headquarters and take pictures of who goes in and out or follow them.

Another reason behind the NLD’s decision to risk legal dissolution of the party appeared to have been to stave off external efforts, by both the regime and other elements, to split the NLD on the election issue.

Aung San Suu Kyi and the senior leadership were fully aware of efforts that attempted to undermine highly respected leaders, including Win Tin, by painting them as “unreasonable hardliners.”

At the same time, the pro-election voices within the NLD (for instance, Khin Maung Swe with little or no national or global standing) were being promoted in the media and foreign policy circles as moderates or pragmatists because they were easier to manipulate politically by those who stand to gain from the sham elections, with the purpose of deliberately fracturing the NLD.

According to NLD sources some of the external players who attempted this “divide and rule” tactic were representatives of the aid sector, certain Western diplomats, foreign and local commercial interests, self-styled civil society stakeholders with hidden personal agendas, and last but not least, the regime’s political agents operating in the guise of social entrepreneurs and independent local journalists.

As a matter of fact, the near unanimity of the NLD decision to categorically reject the regime’s attempt to constitutionalize what is in effect a political apartheid speaks volumes about Suu Kyi’s leadership and her till able to rally her colleagues to close ranks when it comes to life and death matters for the party.

Burma “expert” and sometime adviser to Western oil interests, Robert H. Taylor who, by his own admission, has crafted statements for the Burmese regime, was recently quoted as saying the NLD will fade into history. History would be nothing without historical ironies.

Over the past decade, a worldwide cabal of Western interests and their hired mouths from, you rightly guessed, oil, gas and natural resource industries, as well as national security establishments and the global aid industry, have been rooting for unconditional re-engagement with the morally repugnant generals while quietly discrediting Aung San Suu Kyi as “stubborn” and “too moral,” a spin originally manufactured by the regime’s psychological warfare division straight from the Ministry of Defense.

It is conveniently forgotten that Snr-Gen Than Shwe and company are interested in engagement with the outside world, but only on its own terms. Like Teheran’s ayatollahs, the paranoid regime in their capital tellingly named “Abode of Kings” is unable to see engagement efforts as anything other than a global plot against the generals. The regime’s new capital Naypyidaw is a graveyard of all past unconditional engagers—from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and US Sen. Jim Webb to Dr. Ibrahim Gambari and, most recently, Prof Joseph Stieglitz.

If there is to be a real new beginning, it is the NLD’s collective decision to forgo the bogus legality of its party’s existence so that a mass political movement with multiple focal points and leadership circles can organically re-emerge.

Burmese of different ethnic and religious backgrounds should now be able to join and declare themselves as “NLD,” be they residing in the military-controlled “black areas” of the country or in the “white” or liberated zones, that is, armed resistance and cease-fire territories or within the diasporas.

The NLD or future oppositions will have no shortage of supporters, sympathizers and potential members in multi-ethnic and dispersed people seething with a deep sense of pervasive injustices and grievances.

There is another Burma which most Burma analysts fail to see, which is pregnant with potential for new political movements and grassroots-driven societal transformation.

The rank and file of the armed forces, according to numerous army deserters, have become not only disillusioned with the regime’s nationalist propaganda but have also been personally disgusted with their greedy and abusive superior officers.

The civil servants abhor the destruction of professional bureaucracy. The peasantry that makes up the country’s majority lives under economic conditions considered worse than those under the British rule at the height of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and 1930s. The urban business class, including even the regime’s cronies, can’t stand their kleptocratic patrons in generals’ uniforms.

The ethnic minorities, who make up 30 to 40 percent of the total population, harbor a deep sense of injustices regarding the ethnic and socio-economic inequalities—all hold the generals responsible for their plight.

Burmese soil is fertile for political mobilization which will eventually induce system implosion, especially given the potential new waves of social movements that are likely to demand justice, equality and

democratization in nearby geo-political and economic regions, including China, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Dr Zarni is a research fellow on Burma at the London School of Economics and visiting senior fellow at the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. He founded and headed the Free Burma Coalition from 1995 to 2004.

[A boycott can unite the opposition - by B.K. Sen](#)

Mizzima - 8 April 2010

Burma has been plunged into a deep crisis, casting a cloud of uncertainty over the country's first multiparty vote in more than 20 years. Squarely the military leaders have to be blamed. They have brutally seized power and it is their responsibility to return power to where it belongs – namely to the people. In 1990 they tried to show their commitment by holding elections, but refused to honor the results.

Nonetheless, under pressure from peoples' movements and the international community, the regime entered into a facade of dialogue for peaceful transition to civilian rule. But after a lot of drama and gimmicks their true colors have been revealed. The junta still refuses to pay heed to the complaints that the opposition has been venting for years. Never have they entered into talks on the issue of elections. On the contrary, they have kept hundreds in jail as political prisoners, including the democratic icon Suu Kyi.

Arrogantly and contemptuously, the junta is proceeding with plans to hold its election under the widely condemned 2008 constitution. And now, to add insult to injury, the regime has passed electoral laws banning all activists who have served prison sentences from contesting the election. Deliberately, the junta has provoked the National League for Democracy to tighten the noose around its own neck by provoking an intra-party vote to keep the NLD out of the election.

To understand the lack of validity in the present constitution, we have to trace the country's constitutional history. Previously, the electoral process and electoral laws were quite different and the stakeholders were political parties, not the military. Presently, the military is the lawgiver and king and can do no wrong.

History has shown that a number of authoritarian regimes collapsed while negotiating democratic reforms and through electoral competition. Some who were clever, however, redrew their political institutions along "formally" democratic lines ultimately against democratization. This is the case in Burma. When an authoritarian regime is in crisis it attempts "protracted" transition, managing the pace and trajectory of change by conducting limited electoral exercises. This happened in both Kenya and Mexico.

There are strong arguments in favor of Burma's opposition boycotting the election. A critical prerequisite for a democratic election is a free environment; the keeping of over 2,000 political prisoners is in direct contradiction to this. Their release and ensuing declaration of amnesty is essential. Secondly, in order to create a level playing ground, the military cannot be a political party contesting the election. There must also be freedom of assembly, an independent media, independent election commission, independent election observers, equitable allocation of resources and an impartial judiciary.

None of the above criteria currently exist, thereby justifying a boycott. A boycott is a last option. It is a form of political protest in which voters feel the election system is biased; it is a peaceful political tool.

Declarations of various political parties and groups indicate that opposition to the electoral laws is widespread. The main opposition party, NLD, which won a landside victory in the 1990 election, declared that it is not taking part in the country's 2010 election because of the unjust electoral laws. Leaders of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy have also declared their support for the NLD's position. Meanwhile, the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a coalition of 12 ethnic parties that won 67 seats in 1990, has also declared they will not participate in the election.

Further, several armed ceasefire groups continue to defy the junta's call for them to transform their forces into a Border Guard Force. And internationally, leaders from the UN, USA, EU and ASEAN have criticized the electoral laws and expressed the view that the election cannot be free and fair. The overall picture is

that the scheduled election has lost its credibility, and that a broad boycott deals a major blow to the legitimacy of the election while unifying opposition forces.

The question now arises, what is next after the boycott? The military has a stomach for a high level of bloodshed in confronting protests. Yet initiating social movements that hinder the regime's ability to govern or minimize voter participation are the only alternatives. The deciding factor is the ingenuity of the opposition in spreading their arguments to voters who are the ultimate authority. The democratic potential of the people has thus far been unrealized. Faced with a national and global boycott, the junta will become more frustrated and desperate and stoop to all foul means available to prevent any renewed unrest. Repression is the only tool left in its hand. If repression is successful then authoritarian rule continues. But if it fails, concessions are given and democracy asserts itself.

Boycotts do carry an impact, but the final result depends on the interaction of different factors. The challenges are before both the junta and the opposition.

7/04/2010

News - Elections

[Many Won't Vote Without NLD](#)

Irrawaddy – 6 April 2010

By Khaing Thwe

RANGOON—In an *Irrawaddy* survey involving more than 500 people in Rangoon, nearly half said they do not intend to vote in the upcoming election if the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), does not contest it.

The Irrawaddy recently asked 520 Rangoon residents, both men and women, between the ages of 20 and 70, if they will vote in the election, even without the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. Two hundred and fifty-two persons (48 percent) said they did not want to, while 198 persons (38 percent) said they will vote even if the NLD does not participate. The remaining 70 declined to answer or said they had not yet made up their minds.

"I only support the NLD," said a 54-year-old construction engineer. "I voted for the NLD in the last election in 1990. If the NLD doesn't compete in this year's election, I won't have any party to vote for. I am not going to cast my ballot."

A 30-year-old woman said that she will not vote in an election without an NLD presence as she knows Suu Kyi's party alone. She said that she does not know any other party and is not interested in them.

"The election will be meaningless without the NLD," said a student from the Government Technical College. "All other parties contesting the election consist of people favorable to the regime. So, I am not going to vote."

A majority of those who said they will not vote without the NLD participating thought the party had made the right decision in not registering for the election. Some said they had made the decision not to vote as a means of boycott, because they respect the NLD viewpoint and decision.

"I don't think the election will be successful if many people, like us, do not vote," said a 28-year-old taxi driver. "People need to join hands and they shouldn't go to the polling station."

Those who said they will still cast their ballots in the election, with or without NLD participation, had different reasons for doing so, according to our survey.

"As a civil servant I have no choice but to vote. I won't be happy if the NLD doesn't compete in election and I will have to choose another suitable party and vote for it, but not the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association]," said a 53-year-old office worker.

He added that the regime will force civil servants and military personnel to vote in the election, and could also arrange to mark their ballots the way it wanted.

"If I don't go to vote, the authorities will get the chance to use my ballot," a female trader said. "I can't let that happen, so I must vote."

"We should vote because it is our right," said a teacher in his 60s. "We must express our opinion. Also, [the election] authorities will convert our votes into theirs if we don't use them. I have thought about this and that's why I believe we should all vote."

Most of those in favor of voting despite the NLD absence said they do not favor the opposition party decision not to register. Many said that people should vote in the election because during the 2008 constitutional referendum the election authorities had transformed unused ballot papers and advanced voting ballots into "Yes" votes.

A 40-year-old businessman told *The Irrawaddy* he has yet to think about whether he will cast his ballot in the coming election, as there will be no NLD candidate. He said that he will make his decision based on the political situation at that time.

"The political situation is changing all the time," said an elderly man. "It will keep changing, so I can't say yet if I am going to vote."

He said he believes the NLD was right not to register for the election, but that he was also concerned that NLD members would be driven out of politics due to the dissolution of the party, which would be a great loss for the people of Burma.

"The NLD is the party that was elected by the people," said a retired headmistress. "I don't like the way the NLD members made the decision not to register for the election by themselves. I think they didn't pay attention to public opinion. People want the NLD to contest the election and they will vote for them. The NLD would surely win again if genuine elections were held."

[NLD to abide by principles of non-violence](#)

Mizzima - 6 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai - The National League for Democracy (NLD) will abide by the principles of non-violence even if the party ceases to exist in keeping with the Burmese junta's harsh electoral laws, according to Win Tin a senior leader.

"We have decided not to re-register. So, the party may not exist and be forced to go underground. The military regime is propagating a rumour that we may resort to violence. But, we will abide by the principles of non-violence," Win Tin said.

The NLD will forge ahead with its struggle for democracy peacefully under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The junta's electoral laws state the deadline to re-register is May 6. Without re-registration, the party will be automatically dissolved.

Ohn Kyaing, a member of NLD's information committee, said, "even if the party is dissolved, NLD will not abandon the people and its struggle for democracy. We will be with the people." He continued "Although we have decided not to re-register, we will fight to the best of our ability by non-violent means. NLD is where self-sacrificing politicians gather."

"NLD will plunge headlong into social work such as service programmes for HIV patients, social services for Nargis victims among others," Win Tin said.

NLD will cooperate with all its political allies - experienced politicians, Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP), ethnic groups and diplomats. NLD will also maintain its contacts with the news media.

Should the NLD be dissolved, to manage the party's properties, a managing committee was formed on April 5.

Tin Oo, who is presently vice-chair of the party, is the chairman of the committee with 17 members.

After the electoral laws were declared, the junta allowed opening of around 150 of 300 NLD offices in State and Divisions. Among them, the Mandalay office was closed again because the owner of the room was pressurized by the junta.

After the 2003 Depayin attack, NLD offices were closed but NLD members gathered in cafés and monasteries to carry on party activities.

The NLD was formed in the bloody aftermath of the 8888 uprising. In the 1990 parliamentary elections, the party won 392 out of 492 seats, but the junta did not transfer power.

NLD Apologizes for Failed Struggle

Irrawaddy – 6 April 2010

By Saw Yan Naing

Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), apologized to its supporters across the country on Tuesday for "the unsuccessful struggle for democracy" that it had waged for more than 20 years.

The public apology came in a three-page statement titled "*Appeal to the Public*," which was released on Tuesday only in Burmese language. [[Read full statement here.](#)]

"The aim of the statement is to officially apologize to the public for our failed policies in the struggle for democracy," said Nyan Win, the main spokesperson for the NLD. "Nonetheless, we want to inform everyone that we will continue in our struggle to bring democracy to Burma."

The statement included seven points describing the democratic reforms and policies that the NLD had attempted, as well as the persecution the party has faced during its 22-year campaign to bring about a civilian government in the country. It highlighted the military regime's refusal to recognize the NLD victory in the 1990 election, and the threats, arrests and intimidation its members, including party leader Aung San Suu Kyi, had been subjected to over the years.

"Even though we have tried in many ways to introduce democratic reforms and national reconciliation, we have gained no results under the regime's persecution. Therefore, we need to apologize to the public for our failure," said Win Tin, a leading member of the NLD who spent 19 years as a political prisoner.

According to the NLD statement, the party has "stood alongside the people" since its formation, but its members have faced constant persecution, including arrest and imprisonment. The NLD could not succeed in its struggle for democracy due to unilateral oppression by the military authorities, the statement said.

The statement also mentioned the party's willingness to hold dialogue with the Burmese military to achieve national reconciliation. It said all its attempts were ignored by the Burmese authorities.

Even though the NLD had overcome many major restrictions and much suppression since 1988, it decided not to register for the general election this year due to "unfair and unjust laws" issued by the military junta, the statement said.

The NLD won a landslide victory in Burma's last general election in 1990, winning 392 out of 485 parliamentary seats; however, the regime refused to hand over power to the party.

In 2004, the NLD sent representatives to attend the National Convention near Rangoon with the aim of initiating negotiations with the junta; however, the aim failed, said the party statement.

In May 2003, party leader Suu Kyi and her supporters were attacked by junta-backed thugs in Kyee village, on the outskirts of Depayin Township in Sagaing Division, central Burma. She was subsequently arrested and has since lived under detention.

After the attack in 2003, all NLD branch offices were closed down.

In 2007 and 2008, the Burmese military government also arrested and jailed dozens of NLD supporters who took part in the Buddhist monk-led nationwide uprising in September 2007, as well as those who delivered humanitarian aid to victims and survivors of Cyclone Nargis. Many were handed down draconian prison sentences.

In August 2009, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi was handed down an additional 18 months house arrest when the junta said she violated the terms of her detention by sheltering overnight an American intruder, John W Yettaw, who swam across Inya Lake and sneaked into her house.

Despite being detained by the regime, Suu Kyi doesn't hate the junta, the statement said, and has repeatedly called for a dialogue with junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe for the sake of the country.

In her latest letter to Than Shwe in August 2009, Suu Kyi requested a meeting with the junta strongman to discuss the removal of economic sanctions imposed on Burma by Western nations. However, the junta chief ignored her request, the statement said.

In March, the NLD was faced with a political dilemma when the regime announced political party registration laws for the election that effectively bar Suu Kyi from participating. On March 29, the NLD announced that it had decided not to register for the election. The junta's electoral law states that a party that does not register before May 7 faces dissolution.

After May 7, the party will not stop working in the interests of its supporters, said Win Tin. He said the party will conduct social welfare activities, raise humanitarian aid at a grassroots level, and cooperate with its allies, such as ethnic leaders who are members of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament.

He said that the party will also continue to advocate its policies through media channels, as well as via the foreign diplomatic circle. The NLD will also launch lobby campaigns among the people and call for a boycott of the election, he added.

According to NLD sources, if the party is dissolved on May 7, some NLD members may choose to take part in the upcoming election and will probably form a party to contest seats independently.

Khin Maung Swe, a spokesperson for the NLD who previously said he favored party registration, said that those who decided against competing in the election will be "more responsible" than others for the future of the NLD because of their decision.

"If the party is dissolved, it will be unable to perform as effectively as it did in the past," said Khin Maung Swe, adding that the party may face worse oppression than before, which would weaken its activities.

The statement concluded that the NLD will continue to stand alongside the public, and will struggle systematically using all non-violent strategies at its disposal under the leadership of Suu Kyi.

Throughout its history, the NLD said it has focused on creating a democratic nation, human rights, national reconciliation, equal rights for ethnic people, and the formation of a developing nation. Its aims also included steps to prevent another dictatorship in Burma, the statement said.

[Censorship at peak but for pro-poll coverage](#)

Mizzima - 6 April 2010

By Kyaw Kha

Chiang Mai – Media censorship is at its zenith with the general elections in Burma around the corner.

Opinions and comments by political parties on electoral laws are being censored by the Censorship Board by deleting words or entire paragraphs. Portions the regime does not want people to know are being cut, it is learnt.

"They want to show the people in the country and the international community that the people believe in their planned 2010 election and people have accepted the 2008 constitution. This is the way the junta

wants the news reported. We cannot report all the opinions and comments of the political parties," a journal editor in Burma said.

"We can publish only opinions which hails the 2010 election and says it is trusted by the people and this is the one and only way to achieve democracy," he added.

On the NLD's decision not to re-register with the Election Commission, the weekly journals could publish only the decision of not registering but could not disclose the reasons that prompted the decision. The NLD's view that the electoral laws are 'unjust' was deleted.

The electoral laws announced last month state that those who wish to float political parties must sign on the acknowledgment to uphold and safeguard the 2008 constitution. This is not consistent to NLD's policies so the party decided not to contest the election.

The media inside Burma, however, can publish news of political parties registering with the Election Commission along with pictures.

Interestingly, the Censorship Board allowed reportage on some parties welcoming junta's electoral laws and the 2008 constitution, but views to the contrary are not allowed, another domestic editor pointed out.

The electoral laws bar those convicted and serving prison sentences from being a part of the electoral process.

But the UN and the international community have been demanding the junta release all political prisoners including people's leader Aung San Suu Kyi at the earliest and allow them to contest the election.

The junta allowed an article titled 'Lest being in dark side of history' written by an author under a pseudonym, 'A Law enforcer', which depicts political prisoners as criminals. This article appeared on page 19 of the 'First Eleven Sports' journal published today. The articles in the sports journal usually reflect the policy and opinions of the junta.

"Since political parties and parliament are the highest institutions and organs in our country, it must be filled with respected and revered persons, smart and good people, and men of integrity and dignity. If they are filled with convicted persons, degraded persons and wrongdoers, the entire boatload of fishes can be spoilt by a single rotten fish. So it is very important to take into consideration this point," the article says.

"The authorities know well the importance of 2010 election news so the Censorship Board is imposing tighter controls on domestic media than ever before," a veteran editor from a domestic weekly journal said.

News

[US echoes Burma opposition 'failures'](#)

DVB - 7 April 2010

By Khin Hnin Htet

US diplomats have reportedly admitted to Burma's main opposition party that Washington's shift towards engagement with the ruling junta has achieved nothing.

Two officials from the US embassy in Rangoon visited the National League for Democracy (NLD) party's headquarters yesterday where they asserted the US government's disappointment with recently announced election laws.

"[The officials] also made a little acknowledgement that their attempt to improve the situation by making contact with the [junta] has not yet achieved anything," said NLD vice-chairman Tin Oo.

It coincided with a statement released yesterday by the NLD in which it made a frank apology for its failure to overturn military rule in Burma. The NLD decided last month not to contest elections this year, a move that will see the party legally abolished.

The statement said that all efforts over the past 20 years to create dialogue with the junta and to convene a parliament and draft a democratic constitution had "totally failed".

The two acknowledgments together provide a stark reminder of the intransigence of the Burmese junta, which appears set to hold onto power following the elections under the guise of a civilian government.

Sean Turnell, an Australian-based Burma economics expert who has made several trips to the US to meet with government officials in the past six months, said there had been a sea change in attitude in the US since the excitement that surrounded the policy shift in September last year.

"[Now] there is a great deal of anger, on Capitol Hill especially, and a real feeling of having been rebuffed; that the hand had been extended and they were getting nothing," he said. "If anything, [the US felt that] the regime had gone out of its way to make the situation that little bit more uncomfortable."

Washington announced in September that it would seek engagement with Burma following years of an isolationist policy that bore few results. A number of subsequent acts by the junta, such as the imprisonment of US citizen Nyi Nyi Aung, have however thrown sand in the faces of the US policymakers who first pushed the idea of dialogue.

The NLD's boycott of the elections has received mixed reactions. While some observers and the majority of the international community have supported the move, others have argued that the party should have taken advantage of the looming transition, however superficial it is, to gain greater leeway in Burmese politics.

Additional reporting by Francis Wade

[Australia-Burma trade 'up 160 percent'](#)

DVB - 7 April 2010

By Francis Wade

Trade between Australia and Burma has soared more than three-fold in the past year as Canberra continues to resist calls for targeted trade sanctions against the ruling junta.

But this rise does not even factor in Australian investment in Burmese energy projects which would likely see it dramatically increase, said Zetty Blake, spokesperson for Burma Campaign Australia (BCA),

"The trade figures do not include the millions of dollars Australian companies are investing into industries in Burma, like oil and gas, that are directly funding the military regime," she said.

Danford Equities Corporation, a subsidiary of the Australian-owned Twinza Oil, signed a contract with the Burmese state-run Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) in November 2006 to explore for oil in Burma. According to BCA, the deal will net the ruling junta around \$US2.5 billion.

Australia has previously been in the firing line for its ties to the maligned Burmese government. In October last year, the flagship Australian airline [Qantas rejected calls](#) from campaigners to stop subsidiary airline Jetstar from flying to Burma, claiming that it provided an important service for aid workers.

Even proposals last year by the Rudd government to boost aid to Burma were [met with scepticism](#), given the junta's track record of siphoning overseas aid into so-called 'aid agencies' known to be run by the military generals.

But campaigners scored a victory earlier in October after Australian clothing chain, Speciality Fashion Group (SFG), announced it would stop sourcing products from Burma.

According to BCA, however, clothing still remains one of more than 10 commodities traded by the two countries. Australia reportedly also supplies the ruling junta with aircraft and telecommunications hardware, and imports textiles and photographic equipment.

Burma economics expert Sean Turnell said that targeted trade and investment sanctions on Burma were "more urgent than ever" given that it "depends to an unusual degree on the economic and financial resources it controls through its monopolisation of much of Burma's trade".

Australian foreign minister Stephen Smith said last month that looming elections in Burma could not be considered free or fair with the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) effectively forced to boycott them.

[Suu Kyi's party calls for landmine ban](#)

DVB - 6 April 2010

By Khin Hnin Htet

Burma's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party has called for an end to the use of landmines in Burma following a rise in the number of mine-related deaths.

The party's spokesperson, Ohn Kyaing, said the call was made because innocent civilians are being killed by landmines used by the Burmese troops and ethnic armed groups. The majority of casualties occur in eastern Burma's Karen and Shan states, where the Burmese army has been fighting decades-long conflicts with rebel groups.

"Landmines are used in war times. It is no strange thing that armed personnel involved in the fighting are being hit by landmines," he said. "However [the NLD] is sad to hear that innocent civilians become victims and live their lives in danger because of leftover landmines."

He added that if the NLD was given the authority to do so, it would sign an agreement like "many countries in the world...to end use of landmines".

An International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) report in 2007 said that only Burma and Russia continue to use landmines on an ongoing basis, having not signed the global anti-landmine treaty. An earlier ICBL report in 2003 said that both Italian and US-made landmines were being used by the Burmese army.

The NLD statement was supported by the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) secretary, Aye Thar Aung.

"Landmines are not only being laid in military positions but also in civilian zones such as farmland, hillside cultivations and roads, and this is endangering lives," he said.

In an effort to block supplies to insurgents, often accused of sheltering in civilian villages, the Burmese army has been known to plant mines along escape routes used by villagers and refugees.

Burma's eastern Karen state, which borders Thailand, is littered with landmines, the byproduct of a 60-year conflict between the Burmese army and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), both of whom systematically use landmines.

Last week a [five-year-old Karen boy was killed](#) and his brother seriously injured after accidentally triggering an unexploded grenade that had been fired close to their village.

The brothers had recently been forced back across the border from Thailand where they had fled to last year after fighting broke out in Karen state. The repatriation by the Thai army occurred despite warnings from aid groups that conditions in Karen state remained dangerous.

Another area of concern is the Burmese army's use of civilians as minesweepers; people who are instructed to walk in front of troop patrols to detonate mines. Such practices have led to calls for the ruling junta to be investigated for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

[Wa: Junta backed militia battalions are cannon fodder](#)

SHAN - 6 April 2010

By Hseng Khio Fah

The military junta's establishment of militia battalions is to use them as front line forces in its military operations against ethnic ceasefire groups that may continue to resist Naypyitaw's BGF program, according to Ta Ai Nyunt, Secretary General of the non-ceasefire Wa National Organization (WNO).

On 30 March, the military junta held ceremonies to mark the establishment of two militia units, one based along the Thai-Burma border and the other along the Sino-Burma border.

A Lahu militia unit which is based in Mongton township, which is also where the United Wa State Army (UWSA)'s 171st Military Region is active, opposite Chiangmai's Chiangdao district, was promoted as BGF No.1007. Another militia unit which is based in Mongyu, Mongyawng Township, opposite the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA)'s 911th Brigade base, became BGF No. 1008, according to a report from the New Light of Myanmar.

Ta Ai Nyunt said, "It will be difficult using the militias to pressure us [the Wa] to transform into BGF, because even the junta itself can't force them. The militias are only meant to become the junta's front lines just like they are being used in the fighting against the Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' last month."

In mid March, a member of the junta-backed Lahu militia unit based in Namyoom, Shan State East's Mongphyak Township, 51 miles from Tachilek, opposite Thailand's Maesai, was wounded in the fighting against the SSA because the junta had used the group as its advance guard during the operation.

Hseng Merng, a spokesperson of the SSA, also commented that the militia men would be used to fight against their own ethnic groups like the Wa had been used to fight the SSA for years until 2005.

On 4 April, the recently promoted Mongton militia battalion was ordered to move their camp to Loi Khilake, a mountain range facing UWSA's 772nd brigade. The group was reported to have been escorted by hundreds of Burma Army soldiers during their way to the location, a source from Mongton said.

Last month, the group was told to set up a base at Loi Kawng Hona Kyaley, halfway between Loi Khilake and Nakawngmu.

The movement is likely because of the Wa defiance of the junta's BGF program, a border watcher from the Thai-Burma border said.

However, Panghsang submitted a new proposal to Naypyitaw on 1 April. As yet, there has been no information from the Burma Army. Nevertheless, the group expected its new proposal would be considered by the Burma Army because one junta officer would be allowed to command a BGF battalion, unlike before when the Wa rejected having junta officers at the battalion level.

[Junta despatches tanks and trucks to Myitkyina](#)

KNG - 6 April 2010

In what seems to be preparations to take on the armed ethnic rebel group the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its armed wing, Burma's ruling junta yesterday despatched 18 tanks and dozens of military vehicles to the Northern Regional Command Headquarters in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, said local sources.

With war clouds looming in the horizon the fresh batch of tanks and trucks were sent for Burmese troops under the Northern Regional Command. It was transported from Mandalay along the Mandalay-Bhamo-Myitkyina Road, said local sources close to the Burmese Army.

Eyewitnesses told Kachin News Group today that about 150 trucks crossed to Kachin State from Mandalay. However, 97 trucks arrived in Myitkyina including 18 tanks carried in the trucks. Over a dozen trucks and an unknown number of tanks were sent to Bhamo, said local residents.

A day after the unfruitful meeting between Naypyitaw's negotiator Lt-Gen Ye Myint and KIO delegates in Myitkyina on the contentious Border Guard Force issue, the fresh lot of tanks and trucks were despatched to Myitkyina.

Now, the KIO has been given a fresh deadline of April 28 to respond positively to transforming the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), its armed-wing to the Burmese Army-controlled BGF by the junta, said KIO officials in Laiza headquarters in Kachin State, near the China border.

On the latest deadline, the KIO is planning to call an urgent public meeting in Laiza headquarters. The issue will be thrashed out after the public meeting, said a KIO officer in Laiza.

On the thorny BGF issue, the KIO is being continuously pressurized by the junta since April last year. The KIO on its part has been trying to convince the junta that it would like to take up the BGF issue only after the political imbroglio is resolved.

Last month, China provided over 300 military trucks to the junta. These were distributed to 13 regional military commands across the country.

In December, last year, the junta bought 20 MiG 29 fighter jets from Russia.

James Lum Dau, Assistant Foreign Relations in-charge of KIO based in Thailand's capital Bangkok lambasted the junta for its military expansion by buying myriad weapons from Russia and North Korea during the ceasefire period with ethnic armed groups.

The junta also gets weapons from China, India, Singapore and Ukraine.

6/04/2010

News

[Junta's ultimatum to ceasefire groups on BGF](#)

Mizzima - 5 April 2010

By Phanida

Chiang Mai – Three ethnic armed ceasefire groups have been issued a fresh deadline by the Burmese military junta to convert their armed wings to the Border Guard Force (BGF) by this month.

The regime's representative from Naypyidaw, Lt. Gen. Ye Myint, has told the Shan State Army (North) (SSA-N), United Wa State Army (UWSA) and Eastern Shan State Special Region 4 or Meng La group to respond not later than April 22 and 28.

He met the chairman of the 5,000-strong SSA-N, Lwe Mao, on 2 April in Lashio and told him that the ceasefire group must respond to the regime not later than 22 April on the BGF issue or else the organization will be declared an unlawful association.

Similarly Lt. Gen. Ye Myint met representatives of the 30,000-strong UWSA and 2,000-strong Meng La group separately on 1 April and 28 March respectively. He directed the ceasefire groups to give details of the number of their soldiers and the arms they have to the junta or else be declared as unlawful associations.

Thailand based Burma observer Win Min assumes the negotiations are likely to continue.

Meanwhile the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) Vice-Chairman Gawri Zau Sai met Lt. Gen. Ye Myint again yesterday. But the imbroglio is yet to be resolved. The junta wants a meeting yet again and wants KIO to transform its armed wing into the BGF before 28 April.

[Former Kachin rebel leaders advise KIO to accept BGF](#)

KNG - 5 April 2010

In what is possibly a bid by the Burmese junta to exert pressure, leaders of former Kachin armed groups' in a letter last week have advised the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) to accept the regime-proposed Border Guard Force because it cannot take on the Tatmadaw, said KIO officials.

The joint letter said: "The KIO cannot resist the junta alone and will buy trouble," a KIO officer in Laiza headquarters in Burma's northern Kachin State, near the China border told Kachin News Group today.

The letter was jointly penned by Dr. Manam Tu Ja leader of the Kachin State Progressive Party and former Vice-chairman No. 2 of KIO, Zahkung Ting Ying leader of former New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) and Col. Lasang Awng Wa of leader of Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group, said KIO officers in Laiza.

The three pro-junta Kachin leaders said they had written the letter on their own volition without being directed by the junta. KIO officers think otherwise and are certain that they were coerced to write the letter by the regime, said a KIO officer in Laiza.

Meanwhile, however delegates from KIO and the junta side met for the 13th time yesterday morning in the junta's Northern Regional Command Headquarters in Myitkyina, said KIO sources. The meeting focused on transforming the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed-wing of KIO to the Burmese Army-controlled BGF, added KIO officers.

The meeting was held between Lt-Gen Ye Myint, chief of Military Affairs Security (MAS) and Naypyitaw negotiator for ethnic armed groups for transforming BGF and three KIO senior leaders--- KIO Chairman Lanyaw Zawng Hra, Dr. Lahkyen La Ja of General Secretary and Brig-Gen Sumlut Gun Maw of Vice Chief of Staff.

Even as parleys continue, the junta is transporting new artillery and military trucks from Mandalay to Northern Regional Command Headquarters along the Mandalay-Bhamo-Myitkyina road, said local sources.

Eyewitnesses told KNG today, they saw 92 military trucks including 18 trucks carrying artillery pieces each and four trucks carrying Burmese troops from the Light Infantry Division No. 33 based in Ywataung, Sagaing Division crossing Laja Yang Checkpoint on the Myitkyina-Bhamo route, till this noon.

A KIA officer in Laiza, near Laja Yang told KNG today, "I saw that the new artillery guns on the trucks are larger than 120 mm mortars. It must have been received from North Korea and Russia".

The current weapons and troops despatched to Kachin State's military headquarters include about 150 military trucks and over 200 soldiers, said KIA's sources.

The Burmese junta received a variety of weapons from China, India, Singapore, North Korea, Ukraine and Russia.

Given the mounting military tension in the KIO controlled areas in Kachin State and Northeast Shan State over the BGF issue, the KIO/KIA is also gearing up in its own way for war with the Burmese Army.

[US to renew bid for thaw in relations](#)

Mizzima - 5 April 2010

By Larry Jagan

BANGKOK - A senior American diplomat is expected to visit Burma in the near future to try to kick-start Washington's lagging engagement policy with the junta, according to government officials in the Burmese capital.

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell is to arrive in Burma very soon, after Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit later this week, the officials said in Naypyidaw. But senior US officials dismiss this as rumour.

"Neither Kurt Campbell nor I plan to visit Burma next week," Dr Campbell's deputy, Scot Marciel, told *Mizzima*. "We've said publicly that we have been working to find dates that would work for another visit, but nothing has been scheduled."

"We are keen to get there and we have been talking to the Burmese about a visit, various dates have been discussed, but as of today we don't have any set dates," he said.

Nevertheless the regime seems keen for the diplomats to revisit after their last trip to Burma in November. Arrangements were being made for the visit, the Burmese government officials said.

When dates are finalised, this would be the US diplomat's second visit since US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced a change in US policy towards the junta last year – one of maintaining sanctions, but engaging the generals in a dialogue.

Dr Campbell is expected to meet detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, other National League for Democracy (NLD) chiefs, representatives of ethnic groups and key regime officials.

He had failed to see top junta leader Senior General Than Shwe on the previous visit but was expected to meet him this time, according to senior military sources. The credibility of the forthcoming elections and the NLD's decision against running will feature prominently during the envoy's talks with both the government and the opposition.

"We certainly are very concerned about the election laws and the situation facing the NLD," Marciel said. "The laws put the opposition in a very difficult position."

Washington has already taken a hard line on the polls and dismissed them as neither free nor fair. The process could be neither credible nor inclusive while more than 2,000 political prisoners remained in jail and Aung San Suu Kyi was barred from taking part, successive statements by US diplomats and government officials in the past few weeks stressed.

"Burma's new election laws are a step backwards," Campbell aide Marciel, who is also the US envoy to Asean, told an Asia-Pacific security seminar in Washington on Friday. "They are effectively preventing the main opposition party from participating. This is the opposite of the path towards national reconciliation."

Dr Campbell's visit was originally scheduled for March 11 and 12, during his extended trip to Asia in preparation for the US president's planned visit to the region. But this was cancelled at very short notice, just before he was to arrive and without reasons given, senior Burmese officials said.

One of the main reasons proffered is that the US diplomat wanted to avoid being caught in the same embarrassing position as Senator Jim Webb had found himself during on his groundbreaking visit in August. He was allowed to escort out of the country convicted US citizen John Yettaw, who was seriously ill. The Vietnam veteran had swum across Rangoon's Inya Lake to Aung San Suu Kyi's house and entered uninvited, which resulted in the opposition leader being sentenced to three years' hard labour for breaking the conditions of her house arrest.

The US government in recent months had taken up the case of the American citizen and Burmese pro-democracy activist, Nyi Nyi Aung, who was sentenced to five years jail after being arrested at Rangoon airport in September. He was an 88 Generation student leader who American consulate officials had visited regularly. In recent weeks the campaign for him to be freed has picked up steam with increasing calls from US Congress for his immediate release. "Campbell cancelled his visit at the last moment because he did not want to be 'Yettawed'," a former US diplomat said, declining to be named.

A week after the trip was cancelled, the Burmese junta released Nyi Nyi Aung and allowed him to take a flight back to the US. Burmese state-run media announced the early release was because of the junta's "friendship" with the US government.

"This goodwill gesture by the generals may be a key reason that Campbell's trip is back on," a former US diplomat said. "It is being seen as a sign that the junta is prepared to take engagement with Washington more seriously, as the last trip was an absolute disaster."

The envoy's planned visit comes at a crucial time; just after the NLD announced that the country's unjust electoral laws made it impossible for the party to re-register and contest the elections. Under the party registration law, anyone serving a prison sentence cannot be a member of a political party, which automatically excludes Aung San Suu Kyi, who is currently serving a prison sentence under house arrest.

Many countries, including the US, have strong reservations about the NLD's decision, or at least the timing of it. Existing political parties have until early next month to register. "This is Aung San Suu Kyi's second biggest mistake of all time," a Bangkok-based senior European diplomat who deals with Burma, told *Mizzima*. "It's a decision that has condemned the NLD to oblivion."

Twenty-five member countries of the European Union, excluding the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, were reportedly backing this position, several European diplomats said in Bangkok. Privately, senior members of the US State Department have also voiced frustration with the NLD's election decision, Asian diplomats who have discussed the issue with their American counterparts said.

But it is unclear whether Dr Campbell intends to try to convince Aung San Suu Kyi to take a more nuanced stance on registration and participation in the election.

One option that may be discussed is that at this stage the NLD does not have to fully reveal its hand. Under the electoral laws, it could apply for its existing registration to continue by lodging an Nga-1 application with the electoral commission. This would require it to name only two of its top officers: chairman Aung Shwe and vice-chairman Tin Oo. It would not have to declare its acceptance of the 2008 constitution nor expel any of its members currently serving jail terms.

The party would have 90 days after the acceptance of its registration to provide the list of party members. The electoral commission would then have to individually challenge those members it felt failed to comply with the regulations.

“This ... would give the NLD the initiative and put the ball in the regime’s court,” a Burmese legal expert said. “The NLD could still decide at the end of the 90-day period to dissolve, or to submit party lists including those in prison, forcing the regime to deregister them.”

Dr Campbell will certainly be renewing US concerns directly with junta leaders about the questionable freedom, fairness and credibility of the polls. If there is any room to manoeuvre, the US diplomat is well placed to exploit it.

Than Shwe is concerned about the already mounting global opposition to the elections, a process by which he wants to give a measure of legitimacy to the civilianised government that emerges. Already many Asian countries are publicly and privately raising their concerns with the regime.

But there will be no easy solutions. Any concessions, which could lead to an inclusive and credible electoral process, will be hard to wring out of the regime. Dr Campbell’s trip will re-emphasise Washington’s commitment to engaging the junta. But it was never going to be easy, Marciel confided to *Mizzima* in Bangkok in November.

He also said recently: “We predicted it would be a long and difficult process, and unfortunately we were right.”

[US agency accused of sanctions busting](#)

DVB - 5 April 2010

By Francis Wade

The US government aid agency USAID has denied charges leveled by a Burma campaign group that it is breaching US sanctions on the military-ruled country.

The prominent Washington-based US Campaign for Burma (USCB) said in March that USAID funding of the ASEAN Competitive Enhancement (ACE) project, which looks to promote the tourism and textiles industries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, was “not in line with US-Burma policy”.

Burma is a member of ASEAN, but is subject to strict US trade and financial sanctions. A campaign to boycott tourism in Burma has received strong backing from various campaign groups, although this has not been factored into the US sanctions package.

But USAID’s funding of the ACE remains a “violation” of US policy and should be challenged by Congress, USCB advocacy director Jennifer Quigley has told TTR Weekly travel website.

“The spirit of [US Burma sanctions] was to keep American dollars out of the hands of the Burmese regime,” she said. “The way the Burmese tourism economy is structured, it is not a stretch to assume the regime would benefit financially.”

USAID communications director, Hal Lipper, defended the charges by saying that ASEAN had requested funding to Southeast Asia “as a region”.

One of the main arguments against tourism in Burma is that, with the majority of property and services owned by the ruling regime, tourist money would eventually find its way into government coffers. Moreover, rights groups have said that many tourist resorts and services were built using forced labour.

Detained Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi had previously urged tourists to stay away from the country whilst it remains under military rule, although this stance appears have softened in line with growing international engagement with the junta.

The pro-tourism lobby argues however that [interaction with locals](#), although often highly restricted by the government, can contribute towards pulling the country out of decades of isolation.

Tourism currently only contributes to around 0.7 percent of Burma's GDP, meaning that the boycott is largely symbolic and would have little tangible effect on the country's economy. The impact of sanctions has also been lessened by Burma's growing trade with ASEAN countries, as well as China and India.

Burma 'to escape criticism' at ASEAN summit

AFP/DVB - 6 April 2010

Burma's widely condemned election plans will loom large at this week's ASEAN summit, but criticism is unlikely from regional nations with their own flawed records on rights and democracy, observers say.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit is being chaired by communist Vietnam, a one-party state that is accused of overseeing deteriorating human rights.

Laos and Cambodia are other members worried about setting a precedent that would make discussion of human rights more acceptable within the bloc, said Christopher Roberts, from the University of Canberra, Australia.

"I think that's a central concern," said Roberts, a lecturer in Asian politics and security.

Philippine foreign affairs secretary Alberto Romulo has said he will urge members at the talks to call for a reversal of Burma's electoral laws, which he said contravene the junta's promises to embark on a "roadmap to democracy."

Burma's opposition, the National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, said last week it would boycott the ballot – the first in two decades – expected to be held later this year.

Under the new electoral laws, the party would have to expel Suu Kyi if it wanted to participate because she is serving a prison term. The Nobel peace laureate has been detained for 14 of the last 20 years.

Without her, the vote cannot be free and fair, say Japan, Australia and Britain. The United States blamed the ruling junta for the opposition boycott, saying the regime had missed an opportunity to move forward.

Leaders of ASEAN's 10 members are to hold their talks, a twice-yearly event, on Thursday and Friday.

Burma has always escaped formal censure from the grouping in the past and observers see virtually no chance of this meeting producing a joint statement criticising the Burma vote.

"They are holding an election. Why are you complaining? This is the mentality of a lot of the ASEAN," said Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore (ISEAS).

Although a big question mark surrounds the legitimacy of Burma's next government, "not every regime in ASEAN is legitimate anyway," he said.

Thailand's army-backed government, for example, is under pressure from street protesters demanding snap polls to replace an administration they say is undemocratic after coming to power in a 2008 parliamentary vote.

The ASEAN summit comes just a few days after its host, Vietnamese prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung, held talks in Burma with junta leaders.

An Asian diplomat said he expected Dung would have told the ruling generals that the elections will be under global scrutiny and "need to be credible".

But Dung would not have pushed the regime to allow Suu Kyi to run in the polls because Burma could then ask Vietnam to release its own prominent detainees, said the diplomat, who requested anonymity.

Human rights activists say ASEAN's longstanding principle of non-interference in members' internal affairs also restricts its ability to criticise Burma.

Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, said Vietnam "has consistently resisted efforts to raise human rights issues within ASEAN."

The bloc's diverse membership ranges from Communist Laos, one of Asia's poorest nations, to the Westernised city-state of Singapore, the absolute monarchy of Brunei and the vibrant democracy of Indonesia.

"I see a growing gap in the values within the ASEAN states", which are divided between conservatives and those – often led by Indonesia – seeking change, said University of Canberra's Roberts.

The region is at a crossroads, said Yap Swee Seng, executive director of Forum-Asia, an umbrella for regional rights groups.

Rapid economic development and rising education levels have created a strong middle class that is helping to push many countries – including Vietnam, but not Burma – from authoritarian-style rule towards more democratic systems, said Yap.

"The people are demanding more and more participation in the decision-making," he said, adding the issue is whether regimes will be able to adapt to those demands.

[Thein Sein to Attend Asean Summit in Hanoi](#)

Irrawaddy – 5 April 2010

By Wai Moe

Burmese Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein will attend the 16th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in Hanoi this week, in which Burma's upcoming election is expected to be a controversial topic.

A state-run-newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar*, reported on Monday that Thein Sein will attend the meeting by invitation of his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung, who ended a three-day visit to Burma on Sunday.

The two-day Asean summit on Thursday and Friday is the first since Vietnam became the annual chair this year.

During Nguyen Than Dung's visit to Burma, both Burmese and Vietnamese media highlighted the two countries bilateral economic ties from agriculture to aviation to the oil and gas sectors.

However, the political situation in Burma was also on Dung's Burma agenda, and he raised the issue when he met with the junta's leader, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, in Naypyidaw on Friday.

According to Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web site, Dung told Than Shwe that he hoped Burma would successfully complete its "road map towards democratization" for the sake of its people and the stability and development of the region.

The New Light of Myanmar reported on Sunday that Dung encouraged Burma to "exert further efforts towards a free and fair election" later this year, during his meeting with Thein Sein, who briefed the Vietnamese delegation on current political developments including the new election laws and election commission.

Some analysts have cited Vietnam, ruled by a Communist regime, as a possible model for Burma's development. Vietnam launched economic and political reforms in 1986, two years ahead of the Burmese junta declaring a market economy following its military coup.

Vietnam's 2009 foreign direct investment was about US \$21.48 billion, with its largest investment coming from its former adversary, the United States. According to the Asian Business Council, Vietnam ranked third for investment among Asian nations in the 2007-2009 period, following China and India.

Junta officials, including former prime ministers Gen Khin Nyunt, the late Gen Soe Win and the current prime minister, Thein Sein, have visited Vietnam to learn about its development.

Vietnamese officials reportedly told Soe Win in April 2005 that they were working closely with the US, even though it was a former enemy.

Meanwhile, Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa was in Naypyidaw last week, meeting with both Thein Sein and Foreign Minister Nyan Win. During the visit, Natalegawa called on the junta to uphold its commitment to a fair election that would allow the participation of opposition party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 political prisoners.

[Vietnam PM Visits Burma](#)

Irrawaddy – 2 April 2010

By Lawi Weng

Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung arrived in Burma on Friday, just a few days ahead of the 16th Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in Hanoi on April 8-9.

During his 3-day visit, Nguyen Tan Dung will meet the head of the Burmese military junta, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, and Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nguyen Phuong Nga told reporters on Friday.

The spokesman said that the visit is aimed at consolidating and promoting friendship and co-operation between Vietnam and Burma. She didn't say whether the prime minister would discuss the election with Burma's generals.

Burma's state-run newspaper *The New Light of Myanmar* reported a biography of the Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung on Friday, on the first day of his visit.

Vietnam is the chair of Asean in 2010. At the coming Asean Summit, Burma's political situation with regard to its new election law is expected to be raised.

Asean countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, have expressed a willingness to talk to Burma's military leaders about their new election law. Many countries have called on the Burmese government to release detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, calling the move a "key" to winning international credibility and achieving much-needed national reconciliation.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa visited Burma this week to talk to the junta about the election law. He met Thein Sein in the capital, Naypyidaw.

Vietnam and Burma, which are Asean members, have in recent years boosted investment co-operation and signed bilateral agreements involving military and economic affairs.

Khin Maung Nyo, a Burmese economist in Rangoon, told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday that the Vietnamese attempts to take a share in certain economic markets in Burma will change after the election.

"It seems that the Vietnamese want to get in and invest before anyone else," he said.

Vietnam is the 16th largest export market for Burma. The country imports agro-forest, seafood products and electronic components from Burma and exports steel, electric items, pharmaceuticals, industrial goods, chemicals, computers and computer spare parts.

Vietnam had invested US \$23.4 million in Burma by the end of September 2009, according to official data. In the first nine months of 2009, Vietnam-Burma bilateral trade reached US\$60 million. The two countries are currently planning the launch of a direct air route to promote bilateral economic and trade cooperation.

Burmese PM May Lead Political Party

Irrawaddy – 6 April 2010

Burmese Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein may leave his current post to head the new political wing of the government-backed Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), according to sources in Naypyidaw.

Although Thein Sein reportedly wants to retire and is having heart problems, inside military sources said Snr Gen Than Shwe asked him to remain and head-up the new political party.

Several government sources said Thein Sein has been told to hand over his current house and other state-owned properties to the government. The new election laws forbid political parties and their candidates from using state-owned resources, although there is an exemption for resources officially allotted by the government.

The rumor regarding Thein Sein's future is spreading fast among government servants, dissident circles and observers inside and outside Burma.

Thein Sein, who is known to be a trusted associate of Than Shwe (considered to be the patron of the USDA), was named prime minister in October 2007 and led the National Convention which resulted in the controversial 2008 Constitution. In 2001 he was appointed adjutant-general of the War Office and three years later was promoted to the Secretary-1 in the regime's ruling council.

Sources said two other high ranking officers and trusted aides of Than Shwe are expected to take leading roles in the future civilian government: Gen. Thura Shwe Mann, the joint chief of staff in the armed forces who is considered the junta's No 3 in command, and Maj-Gen Htay Oo, the minister of agriculture and irrigation and secretary-general of the USDA.

The 2008 Constitution grants 25 parliamentary seats to the military. It is not known if Thein Sein, Thura Shwe Mann and Htay Oo will run for the junta-sponsored political party as civilian candidates or be appointed to parliament as military representatives.

Sources say two high level officers close to Than Shwe will not enter the political arena. Lt-Gen Myint Swe, head of the Bureau of Special Operations (5), and Maj-Gen Tin Ngwe, chairman of Mandalay Division, will reportedly remain in the military.

The USDA was formed in 1993, and according to official documents has 24 million members, almost half the population of Burma.

USDA members held 633 seats, or 58 percent, at the National Convention convened in 1993 to prepare guidelines for the new constitution. The guidelines were finally approved in 2007 and the Constitution was enacted in 2008.

Opposition group observers say most USDA members are civil servants who were recruited by harassment and intimidation. It also includes teachers, students, business people and political activists.

Many Burmese view the USDA as principally an instrument of the regime that carries out violent acts against opposition activists and civilians. The group has paramilitary members who perform surveillance and search for dissidents in hiding.

USDA members played a key role in the bloody crackdowns during the 2007 uprising and in a deadly attack on Aung San Suu Kyi's motorcade in 2003, in which 100 people were killed.

In November 2005, Htay Oo publicly told USDA members that if necessary the association will be turned into a political party.

Chairman of Burma's Election Commission on EU blacklist

Mizzima - 2 April 2010

Chiang Mai – Deputy Supreme Court Judge Thein Soe, the newly appointed Chairman of Burma's Election Commission is on the EU's blacklist of sanctions. The list, which targets key members of Burma's military regime also includes Dr. Tin Aung Aye, a fellow Supreme Court Judge, and also a member of the EC.

Judges Thein Soe, Dr. Tin Aung Aye and other members on the blacklist including notorious junta crony Tay Zaw, are banned from traveling to the European Union. They are also subject to a freeze on any financial assets they may have in Europe. As such they cannot undertake financial transactions with European based financial institutions.

The two judges and other senior members of the Burmese regime's judiciary were added to the EU's sanctions list following the outcome of Aung San Suu Kyi's August 2009 trial in which she was convicted of flouting the terms of her house arrest after an uninvited American man swam to her home.

According to the EU Council, members of the Burmese judiciary were targeted because of the "gravity of the violation of the fundamental rights of Aung San Suu Kyi. The Council considers it appropriate to include the members of the judiciary responsible for the verdict in the list of persons and entities subject to a travel ban and to an asset freeze".

Before becoming a judge Thein Soe was in Burma's armed forces as a Major General and was a military Judge Advocate General. In 2003 he was appointed to Burma's National Convention led by former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. In October 2007 Dr. Tin Aung Aye was appointed to the commission for drafting the State Constitution. According to the regime's state constitution committee announcement, Dr. Tin Aung Aye received both his master's and doctorate of law in Germany.

[Thailand to Press Burma to Open Elections](#)

AP/DVB – 2 April 2010

NEW YORK — Thailand will be pressing Burma's military leaders in the coming week to open its first election in two decades to all political opponents and ethnic minorities, the country's foreign minister said on Thursday.

"I'm concerned about the national reconciliation and the inclusiveness of the whole new political process," Kasit Piromya said in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

Last week, opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, denounced the government's newly announced laws guiding the election as undemocratic and recommended a boycott of the election, expected later this year.

Her National League for Democracy (NLD), which swept the last vote in 1990 but was barred from taking power, decided on Monday to opt out of the election and now faces dissolution under the junta's laws.

"They have every freedom to decide on their own affairs," Kasit said. "So I honor and I respect that decision."

He said the decision was made after the military announced the electoral laws, "which look discriminatory" because "you are providing amnesty only to the military leadership and not to the rest of the political opposition side of it."

Kasit said decisions should be evenhanded.

"If you were convicted on the political side, there should be a general amnesty and forgiveness so that Myanmar [Burmese] society could start anew where everybody could participate in the political process," he said.

Kasit said Thailand has raised the issue of political inclusiveness with Burma and he will raise it again when he meets Burma's foreign minister in two days at a meeting of the Mekong River Regional Commission, which Thailand is hosting.

He said Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva will also raise the issue when he meets Burmese leaders at the annual summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (Asean) in Hanoi next week.

Kasit said Indonesia's foreign minister is in Burma this week, and "I'm sure he has taken up the concern collectively of the Asean members."

He noted that the Asean member countries have called for "national reconciliation, the national election and so on [to be] inclusive, free and fair, and also with the release of the political prisoners."

Kasit said that if elections are held as a first step toward democracy, "then one has to look whether that first step is conducive to the national reconciliation, to the democratization of Myanmar as a whole or not."

If there is "exclusivity" in the election process, then "maybe that first step is not good enough of a step," he said.

Burma's military authorities "could redress the situation," he said. "There is still time to bring in some of the elements to make that first step—(a) leap forward, back to democracy."

[NLD to plunge itself headlong into social work](#)

Mizzima - 2 April 2010

By Myint Maung

New Delhi – On the heels of its decision not to register with the Election Commission (EC) the National League for Democracy (NLD) is exploring ways to increase interaction with people and plunge itself headlong into more and more social work as part of the party's future activities.

"We will continue with our international relations and at the same time work for the people. We will work for the welfare of the people and serve them," NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) member Win Tin told Mizzima.

For instance, NLD will work for HIV/AIDS patients and provide assistance to political prisoners, he said.

The Committee for Representing People's Parliament (CRPP) held its meeting today at the NLD party headquarters in Shwegondaing, Rangoon and discussed doing social work in cooperation with NLD, ethnic political parties and other allies.

Protesting the junta's harsh and vindictive electoral laws, NLD decided not to register with the EC. After the deadline on registration, in the electoral laws, the party will cease to be a legal party raising questions about its fate in the Burmese political mosaic.

"We discussed the NLD's political stand and how to cooperate with ethnic political parties in future," CRPP Secretary Aye Thar Aung said.

The CRPP meeting was attended by NLD Chairman Aung Shwe, Vice-Chairman Tin Oo, CEC members, ethnic leaders Aye Thar Aung, Pu Cing Tsian Thang, Thaug Ko Thang among other CRPP members.

"All of us respect the NLD's political stand. We are proud of the party. We discussed cooperation between NLD and CRPP," Aye Thar Aung said.

The delegates who attended today's meeting discussed and exchanged views on the party's stand of continuing to operate as a political party even though the junta seeks to abolish it.

[National Political Alliance Applies for Registration](#)

Irrawaddy – 2 April 2010

By Saw Yan Naing

Another Rangoon-based political party, the National Political Alliance (NPA), applied for party registration on Thursday to contest in the upcoming election, according to party sources.

So far, six political parties have applied to the election commission to form a political party since the Burmese regime announced the party registration law.

The main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), announced on Monday that it would not register to contest in the election.

Ohn Lwin, an NPA leader, told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday the party is working on the party platform, policy, constitution and a list of party members. The party has 15 committee members and more than 100,000 members, according to Ohn Lwin.

"Basically, the policy of the party is the national interests," he said. "We will support whoever serves our national interests. And will oppose whoever is against the national interest," said Ohn Lwin.

The party will contest in constituencies nationally, he said, and it expects to win around 20 parliamentary seats.

Party leaders such as Ohn Lwin, Kyi Win, Thein Kyi and Tin Win will contest in locations such as Taungdwingyi in Magwe Division, Kyaiklat in Irrawaddy Division and Mingalardon Township and Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township in Rangoon Division.

Ohn Lwin said he wants the election to be all-inclusive, and the NPA wants the NLD to register as a political party.

Commenting on the NLD decision not to register, he said, "We need to accept the reality in Burma. They need to think about it. If they think about it, their attention may turn to the election."

The NPA party flag has a blue background with a circle in center with a star positioned in the center of the circle.

The six parties that have applied for registration are the Kayin People's Party (KPP), the National Unity Party (NUP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF), the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM) and the National Political Alliance (NPA).

The KPP is led by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the NUP is led by Tun Yi, former deputy commander in chief of Burma's armed force; the DP is led by veteran Burmese politician Thu Wai; and the NPA is led by Ohn Lwin, a Rangoon-based politician who was a candidate in 1990 election.

The UMNPF is led by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising, and the GSUM is led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin.

[Pa-O Seek Party Registration](#)

Irrawaddy – 5 April 2010

By Ko Htwe

The Pa-O National Organization (PNO) submitted an application to the Burmese Election Commission on Friday to register as a political party, according to a state-run newspaper.

The PNO is the seventh group to seek to form a political party after the Burmese regime announced the party registration law.

Officials in the party office based in Taunggyi in Southern Shan State declined to be interviewed when contacted by *The Irrawaddy*.

In an interview in the *Myanmar Times* in October 2009, PNO leader Aung Kham Hti, a former monk and a politician who had a close relationship with former Gen Khin Nyunt, said that if it forms a party, it would be based in Taunggyi and Loilen districts.

In the interview, he was supportive of the 2008 Constitution and viewed the 2010 election as positive for the country's progress.

The PNO signed a cease-fire agreement with the junta on April 11, 1991. The PNO controls Special Region-6 in southern Shan State and has been granted a number of business concessions.

The PNO operates the Jade Dragon (Gems) Co Ltd, the parent company of Ruby Dragon Jade & Gems Co Ltd; Ne Win Tun operates the business, which has enterprises in Mong Hsu in Shan State, Pha Khant

and Tawmaw in Kachin State, Kawlin and Khamti in Sagaing Division and Mogok in Mandalay Division, in addition to a hotel on Inlay Lake near Rangoon.

It is widely believed that high-ranking Burmese generals are shareholders in Ruby Dragon Jade & Gems Co Ltd, the largest company of its kind in Burma. In the early 2000s, the company donated a massive 3,000-ton slab of jade to the junta.

The seven parties that have applied for registration are the Kayin People's Party (KPP), the National Unity Party (NUP), the Democratic Party (DP), the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF), the 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar (GSUM), the National Political Alliance (NPA) and Pa Oo National Organization(PNO).

The KPP is led by well-known Rangoon physician Dr. Simon Tha; the NUP is led by Tun Yi, the former deputy commander in chief of Burma's armed force; the DP is led by veteran Burmese politician Thu Wai; and the NPA is led by Ohn Lwin, a Rangoon-based politician who was a candidate in 1990 election.

The UMNPF is led by Aye Lwin, a former university student leader who took part in the 1988 uprising, and the GSUM is led by Ye Htun, the brother of Aye Lwin.

The Pa-O, also known as the Taungthu, are found throughout eastern Burma. They form the second largest ethnic group in Shan State and are descendants of Tibeto-Burmese who settled in the Thaton region in Mon State around 1,000 BC.

Pa-O dispersed from Thaton with many moving to southwestern Shan State. Up to two million Pa-O are believed to live in Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan states, particularly along the Salween River.

[Communist sons to build 'true capitalism'](#)

DVB - 5 April 2010

By Nay Thwin

A party formed from the ashes of one of Burma's leading communist parties and looking to contest elections this year has said that the country can only flourish under a market economy.

The New Era People's Party (NEPP), one of three parties born out of the Troksyite Red Flag communist party, a branch of the Burma Communist Party (BCP), has said it will register for the elections.

NEPP general secretary, Htun Aung Kyaw, told DVB that he was a "former personal assistance" of deceased Red Flag leader, Thakin Soe, who became one of Burma's most influential communist politicians.

Joining the party will be the Alliance Federation of National Politics, which has already registered, and the United Democrat Party. Both are also formed of former Red Flag members and all have said that they "accept the 2008 constitution for now and believe that the elections will be free and fair and bring about a change".

But in a surprising break with the past, the general secretary of the NEPP, Htun Aung Kyaw, said that the party "will try capitalism for the full development of the nation's market economy".

"Peasants, labourers and farmers can only benefit under industrial capitalism. We will strive for maximum development of the industrial capitalism, market economy and democracy," he said.

He added that the party would install a brand of capitalism which advocates "land ownerships for nationals and freedom for trade and the elections".

At least five political parties have now registered for controversial elections this year, while Burma's main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party has said it will not participate.

Burma already looks set to break with its former ultra-nationalist economic policies, having sold off swathes of state-owned assets to private businesses, most however with close ties to the ruling junta.

Furthermore, foreign companies, mainly Chinese, Korean and Indian, have become increasingly involved in lucrative energy projects in Burma which look set to prop up the ruling regime, which is currently governing over a crumbling economy.

[100-strong army convoy in Kachin](#)

DVB - 6 April 2010

By Akt

Around 100 Burmese army trucks have been spotted close to the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) as tension mounts over its refusal to transform into a border militia.

The convoy was seen close to the Laiza Bhamo-to-Myitkyina highway, apparently bound for the Kachin state capital, Myitkyina, a local resident reported. The KIA headquarters are located in nearby Laiza, which sits close to Burma's northern border with China.

"The trucks looked like logging trucks and there were artillery guns on each one of them," he said. "There were roofs on the trucks to cover up what's inside but since the guns were very big, some parts of them were visible."

Fears are growing that Kachin state will erupt in violence if the KIA, one of Burma's principal ceasefire groups, continues to reject proposals to transform into a Border Guard Force (BGF).

Last month it emerged that the Burmese army was giving systematic [militia training to civilians](#) in Kachin state as a likely preparatory move towards boosting its presence there. The majority of Kachin state is under KIA control, and the training allegedly targeted ethnic Burman civilians, and not Kachin.

Troop deployments were also seen in a town around 20 kilometers from Laiza, while roadblocks were put in place to cut off supply routes feeding the KIA. The same tactic was yesterday reported to have been used in Burma's northeastern Wa state to [block food reaching the United Wa State Army](#) (UWSA), which is also resisting the transformation.

The deadline for ceasefire groups to transform into Border Guard Forces is 28 April, after which they are likely to be declared illegal organisations by the Burmese junta.

But the majority of Burma's 18 ceasefire groups have so far resisted the change, which would see them subordinated to the Burmese army and forced to reduce troop numbers.

Any fighting in the north of Burma could draw the ire of China, a strategically key ally for the junta but one that has warned against unrest along the shared border. Heavy fighting between Burmese troops and an ethnic Kokang army last June forced some 37,000 refugees into China, and [drew a sharp rebuke from Beijing](#).

[Food imports to Wa state 'blocked'](#)

DVB - 5 April 2010

By Ko Thet

Burma's ruling junta has reportedly blocked the flow of food into the country's volatile Wa state in a possible sign of looming hostilities against an ethnic army there.

Tension has been high recently between the Burmese army and United Wa State Army (UWSA), Burma's largest ceasefire group. The two are currently in talks over the transformation of the UWSA into a Border Guard Force.

The 30,000-strong Wa army has so far refused to transform, raising concerns about the future of the already tenuous ceasefire it holds with the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The transformation would see it reduce troop numbers and come under direct government control.

UWSA spokesperson Aung Myint said that the army "would accept" the transformation if certain conditions were altered, although did not elaborate on what these are.

The two sides met on 1 April, where the UWSA was asked by Burma's military security chief, Ye Myint, to submit a proposal regarding the transformation, to be enacted on 28 April.

"It is hard to say whether there will be fighting right after 29 April or just later," said Aung Myint. "Now the SPDC has blocked imports of food into the Wa state."

"There is no food shortage yet in the Wa state but it won't be good for long if the blockade continues."

China has expressed concern about possible outbreaks of fighting in the Wa region, which is located in Burma's northeastern Shan state and borders China. Last year, fighting between Burmese troops and a nearby ethnic Kokang army forced some 37,000 refugees across the border into China.

"China is worried about a refugee influx and weapons smuggling problems on their side if fighting breaks out, and has expressed a wish to maintain peace and stability and see development on the China-Burma border," Aung Myint said.

The Wa army is predominantly made up of ethnic Chinese and is rumoured to receive financial and military support from Beijing. It is one of nearly 20 ethnic armies to have signed a ceasefire with the Burmese junta, although many of these now look increasingly fragile.

The junta has threatened to use force against the UWSA if it finally rejects the offer, and the Wa told DVB recently that it was "[preparing for the worst](#)" should it shun the proposal.

[Top army officials sent to military academy](#)

DVB - 5 April 2010

By Akt

More than 30 battalion commanders from the Burmese army have been sent to top military academies in what analysts say could be preparation for elections this year.

The reposting has included one army major who was sent to the government's Defense Services Academy (DSA), Burma's premier training academy for top-ranking officials.

But analysts believe that the move could be a means to replace existing DSA 'teachers' who are being earmarked for roles as military representatives in the post-election parliament.

"[The government] is making selective replacements so that it can systematically leave the army in the hands of trustworthy commanders during the period of transition," said Htay Aung, chief researcher at the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD).

He added that the junta is selecting officers who, due to health and age, no longer hold active roles in the army and so would be suitable to stand in the elections, while others are being placed in civilian administration offices.

One of the key controversies surrounding elections this year stems from a clause in the 2008 constitution which awards around a quarter of parliamentary seats to the military even prior to voting.

The Burmese junta has said that the elections will herald a transition to a civilian government following decades of military rule, although observers have said the constitution provides ample evidence that the core parts of the current government will survive well beyond the polls.

Htay Aung said that the government has indeed already selected officers to stand for the elections. U Thein Soe, the head of the Electoral Commission, the body charged with overseeing elections, is a former military judge advocate general and is on the EU's sanctions list.

No date has yet been set for the first elections in Burma for 20 years, although government officials have said that they will occur in the second half of this year.

Despite repeated calls from the international community to ensure elections are free and fair, recently announced laws have effectively forced the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), to boycott them.

Opinion / Analysis

[NEWS ANALYSIS: In Opting for Poll Boycott, NLD Goes for Broke](#)

Irrawaddy – 31 March 2010

By Marwaan Macan-Markar / Ips Writer

BANGKOK — If Burma's military regime goes ahead with its promised general election this year, some 27.2 million voters will be deprived of the chance to cast a ballot for the political party that has come to symbolize democratic hope in that oppressed nation.

This is the scenario taking shape after the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by pro-democracy icon and party leader Aung San Suu Kyi, decided on Monday to boycott the general election.

A damning indictment on the South-east Asian nation's first parliamentary poll in two decades, the NLD decision was hardly a surprise. It endorsed the unequivocal message that was delivered days before by Suu Kyi, through her lawyer Nyan Win, to over 150 central committee members and party representatives who met in Rangoon, the former capital.

Suu Kyi, who has been placed under house arrest for over 14 of the past 20 years, had said "she will never accept registration (of her party to contest the poll) under unjust (electoral) laws."

"The NLD's decision not to register the party and contest the elections will be a big loss for the people," says Win Min, a Burmese national security expert at Payap University in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. "There are many people who wanted to vote for the NLD. They will be sad even though they will support the boycott."

Yet the NLD's position may have been exactly what Burma's strongman, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, favored, Win Min explained to IPS. "It seems the NLD played into Than Shwe's hands. He wanted to avoid a repeat of the 1990 election outcome."

In that last election in Burma, also known as Myanmar, the newly formed NLD secured 82 percent of the 485 parliamentary seats up for grabs. But the military regime, which had been in power since a 1962 coup, refused to recognize the results.

It is little wonder why the five election laws rolled out by the junta this month were aimed at avoiding a repeat of its 1990 poll defeat, and the NLD's activism that followed.

The Political Parties Registration Law, for instance, was targeted to keep Nobel Peace Laureate Suu Kyi out of contention by declaring that "people who are serving a prison term cannot form a political party" and that "people who are serving a prison term cannot be a member of a political party."

Suu Kyi, one of the over 2,200 political prisoners in Burma, was convicted of violating the terms of her house arrest when US national John William Yettaw swam to her home last year.

By opting for a boycott, the NLD hierarchy has opted to remain loyal to its popular leader rather than ditching her to meet electoral requirements and contest the poll. "Without any objections, all the party leaders reached a consensus not to register the party and join the election because the junta's election laws are unjust," Khin Maung Swe, a senior party official who attended the Mar. 29 meeting, was quoted as having told 'The Irrawaddy' magazine run by Burmese journalists in exile.

Yet it is a high-stakes political gamble, for the NLD may have placed itself in an awkward position by taking the moral high ground instead of following pragmatic politics. The NLD ignored the "big picture in Burmese politics and the important role it has to play in helping to transform the country towards a democracy," a senior official of a Southeast Asian country told IPS. "Democracy is a process, not a morality play."

Even Western governments who have been trenchant critics of the junta are not all in agreement with the NLD's move. "It is a disappointing decision. It disregards the variety of opposition opinion inside the country," a European diplomat who regularly visits Burma observed in an interview. "The NLD discredits those who will form parties to contest the election."

Between 11 to 15 political parties are expected to register before the May 7 deadline, a number much lower than the nearly 100 that registered to contest the 1990 election.

The coming poll may come to haunt the NLD in other ways, too. "This election will be a referendum on the popularity of the NLD," says Benjamin Zawacki, Burma researcher for the London-based rights lobby Amnesty International. "The test will be whether people participate and vote or acquiesce to the NLD's call to boycott the poll."

"It is political brinkmanship on the part of the NLD," Zawacki told IPS. "Should they succeed and people boycott the poll, it could fundamentally change the political landscape of Myanmar. But if they fail – if voters ignore the boycott and vote for other parties – then it could spell the end of the NLD as a political party."

The risk that the 2010 election may sound the death knell for the NLD has not been lost on the party hierarchy. "Our party can die, but not our political movement," was how Nyan Win, Suu Kyi's lawyer and NLD spokesman described the party's sentiment '*The Irrawaddy*'.

01/04/2010

News

[ASEAN leaders to meet on Burma](#)

DVB - 1 April 2010

By Francis Wade

Burma's prime minister is likely to head to Hanoi next week for a meeting of regional ministers during which, reports suggest, the topic of Burma's controversial elections will feature highly.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping has remained mute on the elections since Burma's main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party on Monday decided to boycott them.

But, according to Roshan Jason, head of the ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), ASEAN "knows it has to discuss the issue and has to be forward about it".

"I think [ASEAN] will just advise the government and try to convince [junta chief] Than Shwe to reconsider the election laws," he said.

ASEAN Affairs Department director-general Vitavas Srivihok told the Bangkok Post yesterday that the election discussion would likely form part of the post-summit statement delivered by ASEAN chairman Surin Pitsuwan.

The NLD had cited the "unjust" election laws as the reason for not registering. Under the laws, detained party leader Aung San Suu Kyi cannot run for office and would need to be expelled from if the NLD is to participate.

Although the ASEAN bloc has condemned Suu Kyi's incarceration and called for elections to be free and fair, it has resisted calls to take any substantive action against the Burmese junta, such as expelling them from the grouping.

The main reason for its soft approach to Burma lies in its policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states, something that has repeatedly attracted criticism from pro-democracy campaigners.

This policy has in turn been used as a shield by the Burmese government to deflect criticism of its human rights record, particularly during the trial of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi last year.

Following the failure of the US and UN to push the generals onto a path of reform, all eyes are now focusing on the influence that ASEAN could have in the country. Jason said that there was little hope of the situation inside Burma changing unless the international community urges ASEAN to press the Burmese junta.

[G8 Foreign Ministers discussed Burma as activists demand election law reforms](#)

Chinland Guardian - 1 April 2010

Burma topped the agenda at the discussion on global peace and security during the Group of Eight Foreign Ministers meeting held in Canada this week.

The two-day summit of top diplomats from the eight most industrialized nations, hosted by Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon, took place in Gatineau as Burmese activists from three Canadian cities held demonstrations demanding that the military junta implement changes to its election laws that unfairly disqualify most of the leading Burmese opposition groups from the polls planned for later this year.

The G8 Ministers express concerns over the recently adopted restrictive electoral law, and call on Burma's ruling military junta to "enable full democratic participation in the upcoming election and to release all political prisoners." They caution that the continued incarceration of political prisoners, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi would undermine the credibility of the junta's elections.

Meanwhile, Burmese activists from three cities across Canada staged demonstrations denouncing Burma's election laws. Rallies were held in Ottawa, Saskatoon and Vancouver. They demand that the junta amend its electoral laws in order to make ways for a truly inclusive and participatory electoral process. They also call on the military regime to cease attacks on the ethnic groups and to start a genuine and inclusive dialogue process.

Arguing that there are clearly demonstrated connections to the supplies of arms to the junta and ongoing repressions in Burma, the protestors say that the international community should support a global arms embargo on Burma.

Rallies were staged in front of the Burmese embassy in Ottawa and city halls in Saskatoon and Vancouver. More than 50 Burmese activists and Canadian supporters attended in each event.

In a related development, Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada was quoted by Kyodo News as saying on last Friday that Japan would not expand economic aid to Burma unless the junta implements steps to conduct an inclusive and participatory elections.

[US Urged to Take 'Middle Path' on Burma](#)

Irrawaddy – 1 April 2010

By Lalit K. Jha

WASHINGTON—Experts urged the United States on Wednesday to adopt a "middle path" on Burma—neither exert too much pressure on the junta nor be viewed as too close to the authoritarian military rulers.

"The US must ensure that its policies do not inadvertently support or encourage authoritarian and corrupt elements in Burma," said retired Gen. Wesley Clark. "At the same time, if the US sets the bar too high at the outset, it will deny itself an effective role in helping to move Burma away from authoritarian rule and into the world community."

Clarke was speaking at the US Institute of Peace, a Washington-based think tank, at a ceremony held to release an Asia Society report on Burma prepared by an independent panel of experts. The panel was co-chaired by Clark and Henrietta Fore, the former administrator of the US Agency for International Development.

"Decades of pursuing policies of isolation and sanctions by the US have done little to influence change in Burma, so it's time to do something different," Clark said as he discussed recommendations, which included the appointment of a special representative for Burma.

"Burma is at the center of a torrent of powerful economic forces, and at the same time its political system is frozen," he said.

Fore said that through its programs and support for the Burmese people, the US can demonstrate that it is steady but flexible, and quick to react to any potential overtures from the Burmese government.

“Specifically, during this period of transition, the US should encourage economic and social development and opportunity, the process of political development toward democratic norms, press military leaders to improve governance and assist the country’s non-Burman nationalities in pursuing an equitable voice in national governance,” Fore said.

Noting that the new direction in US policy will require greater cooperation with regional players in order to succeed, the report's director, Suzanne DiMaggio, said: "With elections expected to be held later this year, the first in Burma in 20 years, the US should make collaboration with other key stakeholders, particularly Burma’s Asian neighbors, Asea and the UN, the centerpiece of its policy."

None of the experts who spoke suggested stronger sanctions against the Burmese military junta or a stronger role for the UN Security Council, as is being called for by several pro-democracy groups both inside and outside Burma.

[600 Karen Refugees Return to Burma](#)

Irrawaddy – 31 March 2010

By Lawi Weng

About 600 Karen refugees return from Thailand to Burma, despite what has been described as the “very unstable” situation there.

The Karen Information Center (KIC), based on the Thai-Burmese border, said the refugees had returned voluntarily but after pressure by Thai authorities.

KIC editor Nang Paw Gay said: “The people lost hope after the Thai authorities told them many times to return to Burma. They decided that whatever happens to them they would go back home.”

Sally Thompson, the deputy director of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), said the situation in eastern Burma “remains very unstable. For any of these people returning, it is going to be difficult for them.”

Many human rights groups, including the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, have appealed to the Thai government not to repatriate the refugees in areas where is the risk of landmines, forced labor and army recruitment.

Kitty McKinsey, regional spokeswoman for the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told *The Irrawaddy* that there is a procedure in place for refugees who choose to return to Burma. The Thai military noted their names and handed the list to the UNHCR, which then interviewed them.

McKinsey said the UNHCR had interviewed more than 700 people over the past few weeks and they said that they wanted to go home.

“What they are telling us is they wanted to go back because they wanted to prepare their field for planting before the rains,” she said.

“From the point of view of the UNHCR, they shouldn't be forced to return. All return to Myanmar [Burma] should be on a purely voluntary basic.”

About 3,000 Karen refugees in the Tha Song Yang District of Tak Province fled to Thailand in June 2009 following clashes between Karen soldiers and a joint force of Burmese government troops and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.

The Thai military planned to deport all 3,000 to Burma in February, but then shelved the plan after pleas by human rights groups and the international community. Nevertheless, about 300 Karen refugees have returned since February.

Meanwhile, a Karen refugee child was admitted to hospital in the Thai border town of Mae Sot on Wednesday with injuries sustained after reportedly handling an unexploded mortar shell in the landmine-sown border area of eastern Burma. A second Karen child reportedly died in the explosion.

Letter From Burma: Forced Relocation

Irrawaddy – 1 April 2010

By Sein Htay

MYITSONE—As the time to leave their villages nears, many people around the Myitsonne Dam construction site feel more and more helpless.

“We don’t want to move, we don’t want to move...But, how can we resist?” complained a frustrated villager in Tanphrel village, located near the planned dam.

There are about 15,000 people from 60 villages who have been forced to relocate to as the government and Chinese Power Investment Corporation (CPI) began construction on the country’s largest hydropower plant at Myitsonne (the convergence of the Maykha and Malikha Rivers), about 27 miles north of Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

Despite their efforts to halt the dam construction, villagers will have to relocate around May this year.

Myitsonne Dam will be about 500 feet in height and produce about 3,600 megawatts of electricity. The government will get about US \$500 million annually from selling electricity to China. While the dam will not be expected to increase electrical capacity among the local people, it has produced a wave of negative impact on the local population and the environment.

When completed, it will flood a broad land area and will alter biodiversity and increase deforestation.

Among the first negative impacts was the forced relocation of thousands of locals and the destruction of their livelihoods. The cultural heritage of Kachin people at Myitsonne is also under direct threat.

“I can’t sleep whenever I think of leaving my orchards behind and our uncertain future at a new place,” said one homemaker in Tanphrel.

She said that she has no idea how to earn a living at a new location. She will leave behind two orange orchards on which her family has relied for its main income for many years.

There are many households like hers in the Myitsonne area. Since the villagers don’t want to leave and don’t want to lose their livelihoods, they have expressed their opposition against the dam construction in many ways.

Facing risks of arrest, they spoke out before local authorities. They held mass prayer services, aiming to halt the dam construction. Kachin people around the world also have sent letters to the government and the Chinese company.

More than 200 new wooden houses with zinc roofs stand on red earth, waiting for their new owners. built by Asia World Company on land near Kyin Khan Lon Ka Zwat Village, about 20 miles from Myitkyina.

Villagers were told by local authorities that they would receive compensation. However, they haven’t been told how much.

“Who can guarantee that we will get compensation for our properties?” a villager from Downphan Village said. “They [local authorities] have various kinds of dirty tricks with which they can erase our names off the compensation list.”

Villagers said they were told that they will have to show documents such as land titles, if they want to get compensation for their property.

While some villagers have land titles, others do not.

Villagers believe that there will be corruption in the compensation process. Some villagers say authorities demand money as a fee for writing a “certification letter.”

Still, there are people who are still determined to stand up for their rights.

“We won’t give up,” said a 45-year-old woman in Myitsone. “We will fight at any cost.”

News - Elections

Western envoys visit NLD headquarters

DVB - 31 March 2010

By Khin Hnin Htet

Australian and the United States’ diplomats yesterday paid a so-called ‘fact finding’ visit to the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party’s main office in Rangoon.

The party on Monday announced that it would not register for controversial elections in Burma later this year, meaning that under recently announced laws it will soon be abolished.

Senior NLD member Win Tin said that the diplomats, whose frequent visits to NLD offices are closely monitored by the Burmese government, enquired about Suu Kyi’s role in the decision and about the party’s tenuous future now that it will no longer be able to officially operate within mainstream Burmese politics.

Prior to Monday Suu Kyi had voiced her objection to registering but asserted that the party must make up its own mind. Win Tin said that her remarks only “made our decisions more firm”.

“But we shouldn’t forget about the people’s role; the people will not accept the points in the election laws which ban Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners [from participating]. These are the reasons for our decision.”

There were reportedly no objections to the election boycott from within the NLD’s Central Committee, who made the final decision, despite a small number of party members having previously urged the NLD to compete.

The international community has on the whole been supportive of the NLD’s decision, despite mixed reactions from inside Burma. The US has repeatedly condemned the elections as a sham while Australia’s foreign minister said this week that the polls cannot now be considered free and fair.

As to the future of Burma’s main opposition party, the prospects are worrying – Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and the majority of the influential senior members are elderly. But, Win Tin said, there is scope for a new emphasis on greater engagement with Burmese people, something that the party has been restricted from doing in its 22-year history.

“We explained [to the diplomats] that we will be working on social welfare programmes for the people as well as programmes to provide aid and protect people from suffering,” he said. “Holding on to these policies, we will make our stand. Our party won’t just sit and watch.”

Burma's Press Censored on NLD Decision

Irrawaddy – 31 March 2010

By Ko Htwe

Outside Burma the reactions of the press and observers to the National League for Democracy’s (NLD’s) decision not to contest this year’s election have been numerous and varied, but inside Burma the military government’s Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) is forcing newspapers and other publications to publish the official line on the NLD decision, if they publish at all.

To date, Burma’s state-run newspapers have been silent about the NLD’s decision.

After submitting articles to the censorship board for verification, journals *Myanmar Newsweek* and *The Yangon Times* on Tuesday were forced by the PSRD to report that the NLD’s decision will disrupt the election, according to media sources in Rangoon.

Myanmar Newsweek wrote: "The NLD's decision not to participate in the planned election damages the peaceful transition to democracy for the country and its citizens."

In Burma, every publication is required to verify its articles through the PSRD before publication.

One Rangoon-based editor told *The Irrawaddy*: "For our journal, if we want to publish the NLD decision, I think the censorship board will only give us permission if we write what they want."

The NLD executive committee decided unanimously on Monday not to register the party for the election. The election laws promulgated by the regime state that any party that fails to register by a deadline in early May will cease to exist legally.

The NLD executive committee's decision not to register was prompted by the election laws, which members described as "unjust" and unlikely to result in a fair and inclusive election.

The laws excluded anyone serving a criminal sentence from participating in the election—a provision that bars NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. In order to participate in the election, the NLD would have had to expel Suu Kyi from the party.

In contrast to the muted reaction inside Burma, observers and publications outside the country have lined up to deliver their opinions on the NLD decision and its consequences.

"If the NLD fails to register, Burma's regime will do as they did at the 1993 National Convention. They will say it is not our fault the NLD did not participate in the elections and become part of the new government. That it was the NLD's own decision," said Win Min, a Burma analyst based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political commentator living in exile, told *The Irrawaddy* that the NLD decision stemmed from the unjust 2008 Constitution and the unjust election laws. "The NLD has to confront these unjust laws," Aung Naing Oo said. "So the question arises how they will confront them: within the law or outside the law. The party cannot legally stand without registration, so they have to confront the unjust laws outside the law."

Aung Naing Oo said the NLD's next step is "delicate and important."

Other observers say that the future response of the Burmese military junta depends on the next steps of the NLD.

"The situation is now in the military junta's hands and they can do what they want," said Chan Htun, a veteran Rangoon politician, pointing out that if NLD members continue to deliver speeches urging a boycott of the election, they could be arrested.

"The parties that boycott [the election] will be outlawed," said Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network on Burma. "And we have to understand that in the past when people were members of a so-called outlaw organization, they were sent to jail. So this is a very big threat."

Stothard used a football analogy to describe the environment established by the regime's election laws, saying that the Burmese military government has organized a game where only one team is allowed to play and there is only one goal post.

[Ethnic coalition backs NLD boycott plans urges others to follow](#)

Chinland Guardian - 31 March 2010

The exile Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) on Wednesday says it welcomes the decision of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party to boycott the military-planned elections in protest of the unfair electoral laws. The statement came at the conclusion of the group's annual meeting held on March 27-31 at a location on the Thai-Burma border.

The ENC, which is composed of representatives from Burma's ethnic states, also urges other political parties to follow the NLD's lead.

"It is important that the 1990 elections winning political parties continue to oppose the 2010 elections as the polls are only part of a process that will realize the regime's Seven-Step Roadmap."

It, however, notes that despite the limited options available to them leaders inside Burma must use the military planned elections to their best advantage.

The annual meeting was attended by representatives from each ethnic state coordinating body, along with their special advisory members. It reviewed the current political situations and laid down future plans.

“The meeting allowed us to build greater understanding and define clarity to our purpose. We are ready to move forward with new thinking and new energy for the people of Burma,” says Victor Biak Lian, the newly-appointed Secretary of Strategic Studies Department of the ENC.

The meeting also elected a new rotating Chairman. Colonel Htoo Htoo Lay of the Karen National Union (KNU) will now head the broad-based ethnic coalition over the next year.

The ENC declaration comes on the heels of the announcement over the weekend of the decision of the newly reformed NLD Central Committee, which unanimously agreed not to participate in the upcoming elections.

[New Rakhine party to register with EC](#)

Mizzima - 1 April 2010

By Salai Han Thar San

New Delhi – The Chairman of a new ethnic Rakhine party, Union of Myanmar National Political Forces (Rakhine State), has said the party will register with the Election Commission next month to contest the 2010 election.

“We are planning to register our party before or after the Thingyan festival. We are still discussing the issue,” party Chairman Aye Kyaing told Mizzima.

Aye Kyaing was a member of Kyaungkawthar, or The Study Group, prior to forming the UMNPF (Rakhine State).

The Study Group has been toeing the Burmese military junta’s line while being critical of the main opposition party National League for Democracy. It is alleged that The Study Group was receiving financial support from the junta.

Aye Kyaing has been the Chairman of UMNPF (Rakhine State) since its inception in 2005, though the party was not legal. The Vice-Chairman of the party is San Tin from Myauk Oo, with Secretary Myint Zaw from Sittwe and Joint-Secretary Maung Ohn Tin from Kyauk Taw.

The party has branch offices in 14 townships including Sittwe, Kyauk Taw and Myauk Oo out of a total of 17 townships in Rakhine State. Party membership, according to Aye Kyaing, is over 240,000.

“We have done organizational work in all townships except Than Dwe (Sandoway), Gwa and Man Aung. We have also already mobilized 180 Rakhine people in Rangoon,” he elaborated.

However, Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) Chairman Aye Thar Aung said new Rakhine parties likely to contest the elections cannot work for the benefit of Rakhine State as the 2008 Constitution ignores ethnic rights.

“There is no room for doing work for the people in Rakhine State under the 2008 Constitution and 2010 electoral laws,” he said.

In the 1990 general elections, the ALD won 11 constituencies out of a total of 26 in Rakhine State. The NLD was the second largest winning party, taking nine constituencies.

Some military officers believed to be representatives of the National Unity Party (NUP), a political party formed by the military junta, members of the Burma Socialist Program Party and the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) are also conducting organizational work and touring Rakhine State, say local residents from Sittwe.

“Some military officers visited our wards and asked what community development work we want done, such as repairing roads or schools. They have never done this before,” explained a Sittwe grocery store owner.

Pro-junta parties such as the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, 88 Generation Student Youths and National Unity Party have already registered with the Election Commission.
