

## **U.N. Myanmar envoy demands junta 'reconsider' drafted constitution**

Kyodo News - 28 February 2008

TOKYO - U.N. special envoy on Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari urged the junta in Myanmar on Thursday to "reconsider" a draft constitution it compiled for a referendum planned for May calling for more freedom and said he intends to discuss the matter with Myanmar leaders in his visit to the country next week.

Gambari said in an interview with Kyodo News in Tokyo that an early release of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi should be indispensable to the future process of Myanmar democratization and opinions of her National League for Democracy should be more reflected in a future constitution.

"We hope during my next visit to discuss with them (junta officials) and...try to persuade them to reconsider so that this constitution would be broader," Gambari said, noting he will visit Myanmar "next week."

Gambari also urged the junta to ensure "freedom of political prisoners including Aung Sun Suu Kyi and opportunity for free expression of views." He also said the Myanmar authorities should allow the NLD to have offices open throughout the country as the party currently has an office only in Yangon.

"All these will enhance the credibility" of the democratization process in Myanmar through events such as the referendum and general elections planned for 2010, Gambari said.

Gambari said he will try to meet with junta chief Senior Gen. Than Shwe, chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, as well as Suu Kyi during his stay in Myanmar.

On the fresh economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar by the United States earlier this month, Gambari said a two-prong "pressure and incentives" approach is necessary to urge the junta to promote democracy.

"Even the Americans in announcing the new sanctions have also said they support the efforts of the secretary general and the security council to mediate the situation," Gambari said.

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## **US urges 'inclusive and transparent' vote in Myanmar**

AFP - 29 February 2008

WASHINGTON - The United States Thursday called on Myanmar's military junta to put in place conditions for "inclusive and transparent" voting ahead of a constitutional referendum set for May.

"A credible political transition in Burma must be inclusive and transparent. It must involve universal suffrage, secrecy and security of the ballot, and freedom of speech and association, among other internationally accepted standards," State Department spokesman Tom Casey said in a statement.

To be credible, Casey said, balloting "must be evaluated through comprehensive, long-term monitoring by independent domestic and international observers."

"The path to national reconciliation in Burma lies in the release of all detainees and political prisoners, including (jailed democracy activist) Aung San Suu Kyi, and the establishment of a genuine dialogue between the regime leadership and Burma's democratic and ethnic minorities leading to a transition to democracy."

Those reforms have been urged not only by Myanmar's citizens, Casey said, but also by the UN Security Council, which issued a call for reform in an October 2007 statement.

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### **NLD party says government's referendum plan hurts reconciliation prospects**

Associated Press - 29 February 2008

YANGON, Myanmar - Myanmar's main pro-democracy party warned Thursday that the ruling military junta's planned constitutional referendum could hurt the nation's efforts toward political reconciliation.

The National League for Democracy party was responding to the government's announcement Tuesday of a law establishing procedures for the referendum on a new constitution, and for setting up a 45-member commission to supervise the vote.

An NLD statement noted that the commission's members are hand-picked by the junta without outside consultation and said that caused a lack of confidence.

"The unilateral action of the authorities lacks the trust of the people and harms national reconciliation," it said.

The NLD statement said authorities have not released the text of the draft constitution. Guidelines for the constitution's drafting have been released and would allow the military to perpetuate its rule.

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### **Better to have Myanmar in ASEAN than an arena for big power conflicts**

Channel NewsAsia – 29 February 2008

SINGAPORE: Several Singapore parliamentarians have raised questions on the future of the ASEAN Charter.

MP for Jurong GRC, Dr Ong Chit Chung, asked if ASEAN could move forward when it is still held back by what he called the "unworkable formula of decision by consensus".

He said the weakness of this formula was most obvious from Myanmar's attitude at the ASEAN Summit in November 2007, over international responses to its crackdown on protesting monks in Yangon.

Another MP, Michael Palmer of Pasir Ris—Ponggol GRC went as far as to ask if Myanmar should be suspended or expelled from the grouping if it refuses to recognise the provisions of the Charter.

The ASEAN Charter had been drawn up to make the grouping a more effective and rules—based organisation.

The MPs had spoken during the debate on the Foreign Ministry's budget in Parliament on Thursday.

Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo who rejected Mr Palmer's suggestion, gave a picture of the geopolitics involved in such a scenario.

He explained: "We do not talk about such a possibility openly, but I am quite sure that ministers and officials do consider this possibility in their own internal considerations.

"But let us push that hypothetical possibility, say we expel Myanmar from ASEAN, rid ourselves of a problem. What happens?"

"Myanmar is the buffer state between China and India. China has vast interests in Myanmar; India has vast interests in Myanmar. If it is not a member of ASEAN, both sides will have to create options for themselves in that country.

"And if there is internal discord, in self—defence, each will have to interfere to protect its own self—interests. So if China and India are dragged in, I think the Americans, the Japanese and the others will also be alarmed.

"In the end, Myanmar can become an arena for big power conflicts."

When this happens, he said Singapore's own interests will be dragged in too.

So Mr Yeo concluded that "it would be better that we pinch our noses, and bear with the problem, and keep Myanmar within ASEAN's table, than to come to the conclusion that jumping out from the frying pan will land us in a cooler situation."

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

AFP - 28 February 2008

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

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

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

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

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

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

'That was against the advice and demands of international organisations, including the United Nations. All responsible persons should be included in the process of drafting the state constitution and the transformation of the nation,' the NLD said.

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

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

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**UN Envoy To Press Myanmar On Credibility: Japan**

AFP - 28 February 2008

TOKYO - Japan on Thursday offered support to the UN special envoy on Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari, saying he had pledged to press the junta to prove the credibility of its democratization process.

Gambari met with Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura on a trip to brief leaders in Tokyo before he makes his next visit to military-ruled Myanmar in March.

"Japan absolutely supports your activity," Komura told him, according to a foreign ministry statement.

"Special envoy Gambari said the Myanmar government needs to increase transparency and credibility, even though its announcement on a constitutional referendum and the timetable for democratic elections is a positive sign," the ministry statement said.

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**Myanmar bans public speeches**

AFB - 28 Feb 2008

YANGON: Myanmar's military rulers said Wednesday they would imprison anyone caught giving public speeches or distributing leaflets about a constitutional referendum set for May.

A new law enacted to oversee the balloting allows for up to three years in prison for "attempts to destroy the referendum by giving a speech in public and leafleting," the official Mirror newspaper said.

"Whoever breaks these restrictions or attempts to break them, whether found breaking them or helping to break them, can be sentenced to not more than three years' imprisonment or a 100,000 kyat (\$85) fine," it said.

Tampering with the ballot box and ballot papers was also declared a crime. Myanmar announced that it had enacted the law and set up a 45-member commission to organise the referendum.

The law said the date for the referendum would be announced at least 21 days before the balloting.

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**Indonesia Favors Suu Kyi's Inclusion In Myanmar's Democratic Process**

RTT News, NY - 27 February 2008

Indonesia favors democracy leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's inclusion in the political process in military-ruled Myanmar, the country's foreign minister said on Wednesday.

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda also said that Indonesia welcomed the announcement of the May constitutional referendum and 2010 elections, "but Indonesia is still advocating an engagement by Association of Southeast Asian Nations-ASEAN with Myanmar."

Wirayuda said that Indonesia, the largest member of the ASEAN, to which Myanmar also belongs, should along with other members of the group still engage with the military regime to push for an inclusive political process.

Wirayuda told a press briefing that Indonesia supported the mission of Ibrahim Gambari, the U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon's special representative to Myanmar, on promoting national reconciliation in Myanmar.

"But Myanmar, being a member of the ASEAN family, we see the importance of ASEAN or Indonesia, at least, to engage Myanmar so we can ensure that the process that they are now

undertaking could result in the solution that is also acceptable to the international community," Wirayuda said.

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### **China dismisses call by Myanmar activists for Olympic boycott**

Associated Press – 27 February 2008

BEIJING - China urged an activist group in Myanmar that called for a boycott of this year's Olympic Games to have a "correct understanding" of Beijing's policy toward their country.

China's "good neighborly and friendly policy" toward Myanmar "serves the interest of the people in Myanmar and also in China," Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said Tuesday.

"The policy is conducive to the democratic process of reconciliation and peace in Myanmar. I hope relevant organizations could have a correct understanding of this policy," Liu said.

Pro-democracy activists in Myanmar called Monday for the world to boycott the Beijing Olympics over what they said was China's continuing support of Myanmar's military dictatorship.

Liu said China opposes any move to link the Olympics with politics.

"Our main concern is that the Olympic Games is a great gathering event of the Chinese people and world people and they shall not be politicized or boycotted under some political excuses," Liu said.

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### **Singaporean, 10 firms under US Myanmar sanctions**

AFP - by Ian Timberlake Tue Feb 26, 9:35 AM ET

SINGAPORE - A Singaporean citizen and 10 of her companies have been targeted under fresh US sanctions aimed at the Myanmar junta, adding to a list of city-state firms hit by US sanctions.

OFAC listed Ng's other companies as: G A Ardmore Pte Ltd, G A Capital Pte Ltd, G A Foodstuffs Pte Ltd, G A Land Pte Ltd, G A Resort Pte Ltd, G A Sentosa Pte Ltd, G A Treasure Pte Ltd, G A Whitehouse Pte Ltd, and S H Ng Trading Pte Ltd. Singapore strongly denies allegations that it allows banks based here to keep illicit funds on behalf of Myanmar's secretive generals.

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### **Myanmar sets up panel to oversee referendum**

Agence France-Presse . Yangon – 27 February 2007

Myanmar's military rulers announced late Tuesday they have set up a 45-member commission to oversee a constitutional referendum slated for May, but gave no precise date for the balloting.

State television said a law to govern the referendum had been enacted, but said details on its provision would be released today (Wednesday).

The new commission will be headed by the Supreme Court chief justice, Aung Toe, who also led up the panel tasked with writing the final version of the proposed charter.

That panel wrapped up its work one week ago, but the document still has not been released.

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### **Myanmar to jail referendum disrupters**

Associated Press – 26 February 2008

YANGON, Myanmar - Anyone who distributes leaflets or makes speeches against Myanmar's constitutional referendum can be imprisoned for three years under new rules governing the May vote published by state media Wednesday.

The Constitutional Referendum Law also allows for voting to be postponed or canceled in places affected by a "natural disaster, security breach or other harm that could endanger the holding of a free and fair referendum."

Critics say the junta's plans are undemocratic because they did not include input from opponents of military rule, especially the opposition National League for Democracy party.

The junta's opponents also complain that guidelines earlier adopted for writing the new constitution are designed to perpetuate military control and prevent Suu Kyi from running for office. The text of the proposed constitution has not yet been released, although a committee hand-picked by the military completed it on Feb. 19.

The 12-chapter referendum law covers the preparation of electoral rolls, voting, postponement and cancellation of voting, vote counting, announcement of the results and punishment for violations of its statutes.

The law, enacted Tuesday and published Wednesday in Myanmar-language newspapers, carries a three-year prison term and a fine of \$86 for anyone who makes speeches or distributes leaflets to disrupt the voting process, the newspapers said. Tampering with ballot boxes carries the same penalty.

Monks, nuns, high-ranking Christian and Hindu officials, the mentally ill, people living in exile, convicted felons and foreigners are not eligible to participate in the referendum under the law. Islamic clergy are not mentioned, so can apparently vote.

Ballot boxes will be opened at polling stations and votes will be counted by polling booth officers in the presence of at least 10 eligible voters, the newspapers said. There was no mention of independent observers being allowed to oversee voting or ballot counting.

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### **Myanmar's NLD says Suu Kyi must have role in politics**

Channel NewsAsia - 25 February 2008

YANGON - Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi must be allowed to play a role in the nation's political process, her party said on Monday, adding the ruling junta was wrong to bar her from elections.

Foreign Minister Nyan Win last week confirmed to his Southeast Asian counterparts that the military's new constitution would bar Aung San Suu Kyi from running in elections that have been slated for May.

Her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), warned in a statement that the junta was wrong to rule her out before voters were given a chance to decide on the charter in a referendum set for May.

"Aung San Suu Kyi is someone who definitely must be involved in Myanmar's political process," the NLD said.

"It's completely unlawful for an unauthorised person to comment on the election, because there is still no constitution and no election law," the party said, referring to Nyan Win.

"This comment is a personal and political attack on Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, and it also sounds like a pre-determined decision to not allow her to participate in elections," it said.

Nyan Win told a regional gathering in Singapore that the new constitution would ban Aung San Suu Kyi from politics because she married a Briton and her two sons have British nationality.

But the party insisted that Aung San Suu Kyi's family has unrivalled nationalist credentials, because her father General Aung San gave his life to lead the struggle for independence from Britain.

Nyan Win's comments could "harm the national reconciliation process and the country's peace and stability," the party said.

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**Bush urges international pressure on Myanmar**

AFP - 25 February 2008

WASHINGTON - US President George W. Bush on Monday slammed the situation in Myanmar as "deplorable," and urged international pressure for democratic change and the release of political prisoners.

"Concerted international pressure is needed to achieve a genuine transition to democracy in Burma," Bush said in a statement.

"We encourage Burma's neighbors and other stakeholders in Southeast Asia to impress upon the regime the need to release all political prisoners," he said after the United States announced a new round of sanctions against supporters of the military junta.

"The situation in Burma remains deplorable," Bush said.

He accused the military regime of rejecting calls for dialogue with opposition groups, "arrests and secret trials of peaceful political activists" and "severe human rights abuses by the Burmese Army, including burning down homes and killing civilians."

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**US slaps more sanctions on supporters of Myanmar regime**

AFP - 25 February 2008

WASHINGTON - The United States on Monday said it was imposing additional economic sanctions on supporters of Myanmar's military regime which it accuses of grave human rights abuses.

The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced sanctions targeting several business figures, including Steven Law, also known as Tun Myint Naing and his father, Lo Hsing Han, dubbed the "Godfather of Heroin."

OFAC also targeted Law's wife, Cecilia Ng, and various companies, and announced additional financial sanctions against the business network of Tay Za, a Burmese tycoon and arms dealer with ties to Myanmar's military rulers.

The sanctions are the latest actions taken by Bush's administration against the Myanmar junta and its supporters, and the second action taken against Tay Za's business network this month.

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

The companies designated by OFAC Monday include conglomerate Asia World Co. Ltd. and its subsidiaries, Asia World Port Management, Asia World Industries Ltd., and Asia World Light Ltd.

OFAC also has identified 10 companies in Singapore owned by Cecilia Ng, including Golden Aaron Pte. Ltd., the property interests of which are now blocked.

The department accused Law and Lo Hsing Han of a history of involvement in illicit activities.

"Lo Hsing Han, known as the 'Godfather of Heroin,' has been one of the world's key heroin traffickers dating back to the early 1970s," it said.

"Steven Law joined his father's drug empire in the 1990s and has since become one of the wealthiest individuals in Burma."

Lo Hsing Han founded Asia World Co. Ltd. in 1992 and his son, Law, currently operates as the managing director.

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

The US sanctions also target two Myanmar hotel chains owned by "designated regime henchman" Tay Za: Aureum Palace Hotels & Resorts and Myanmar Treasure Resorts. Both are part of the Htoo Group of Companies, an entity designated by OFAC on February 5.

Bush sanctioned Tay Za and his network of companies in October 2007, and additional parts of his financial network in February.

The action against the individuals and firms freezes any assets they have under US jurisdiction and bars Americans from conducting business with them at the risk of heavy fines and prison sentences.

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### **UN envoy urges credible referendum and elections in Myanmar**

DPA - 25 February 2008

Singapore - UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari and Foreign Minister George Yeo agreed that Myanmar's plan for a referendum on a new constitution followed by elections has to be "credible and inclusive" for national reconciliation, Singapore's foreign affairs ministry said Monday.

During their meeting in the city-state, both "noted positively" Myanmar's announcement for a referendum on the constitution in May and elections in 2010, the ministry's statement said.

Gambari arrived in Singapore on February 23 and departs on Tuesday as part of a regional tour.

Myanmar's military junta said earlier this month it would hold the referendum followed by the election. However opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been prohibited from taking part because she is the widow of a foreigner, the junta said.

Gambari, the UN secretary general's special envoy on Myanmar, has said he intends to discuss the banning of Suu Kyi with the authorities in Myanmar early next month.

Myanmar should revise the proposed constitution to include the interest of opposition and minority groups or the referendum would have no credibility, he said.

While in Singapore, Gambari also called on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. "There were exchanges of views on Gambari's...tour of the region and international support of his mission in Myanmar," the statement said.

Lee and Yeo reiterated the city-state's support for Gambari's visit to Myanmar to help in the country's work toward national reconciliation.

Singapore currently holds the chairmanship of the 10-member Association of South-East Asian Nations, which includes Myanmar.

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### **Myanmar opposition calls on world to boycott Beijing Olympics**

BANGKOK - Myanmar democracy activists called Monday on people across the world to boycott televised coverage of this summer's Olympics in Beijing, in protest at China's support for the ruling military junta.

The 88 Generation Students group, which includes some of the country's top pro-democracy leaders, also urged viewers against buying any merchandise linked to the Games.

The Olympics are set to open on August 8, the 20th anniversary of a pro-democracy uprising led by students in Myanmar.

The military, which has ruled the country formerly known as Burma since 1962, opened fire on the crowds, killing an estimated 3,000 people.

Leaders of the uprising were handed lengthy prison sentences, but when released they formed the 88 Generation Student group.

The group began new protests in August last year, harnessing public anger at a surprise hike in fuel prices that left many unable to afford even meagre bus fares to work.

Many of the leaders were again arrested, but Buddhist monks took over the protest movement, which swelled into the biggest anti-government uprising since 1988.

In a statement issued by leaders now in hiding, the group called "for citizens around the world to pressure the government of China to withdraw its unilateral support of the Burmese military junta and to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics."

"China is a major trade partner, major arms supplier and major defender of the junta in the international arena," it said.

"The military junta in Burma is still in power to this day, despite strong and continuous resistance by the people of Burma, because of China's support."

The group said that instead of supporting the regime, China should help to facilitate a national dialogue among the military and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest.

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### **Myanmar authorities extend detention of deputy opposition leader**

Agence France Presse - 13 February 2008

Myanmar's military rulers Wednesday extended the house arrest of Tin Oo, the deputy to detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, an official said.

Tin Oo, 80, was ordered confined to his Yangon home for another year, a Myanmar official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Tin Oo is the deputy leader of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party. The international community, as well as local activists, have repeatedly called for the pair to be released.

He was arrested along with the Nobel peace prize winner in May 2003, after a pro-government mob attacked their convoy during a political tour of the country's north.

The two led the NLD to victory in 1990 elections, but the junta never recognised the result.

Tin Oo was initially held in prison in Kalay in the remote northwest, but in February 2004 was brought back to his home in Yangon, where he has been held ever since.

More than 1,800 political prisoners are believed detained in Myanmar, including about 700 held over pro-democracy protests led by Buddhist monks in September.

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### **Activists flee Myanmar crackdown to Thailand**

Reuters - 13 February 2008

Defying international calls to relent, Myanmar's junta is still hunting down activists involved in September's monk-led protests, causing scores to flee to Thailand, fugitives and aid workers said on Wednesday.

"They will not stop," said one 36-year-old former political prisoner who arrived in the Thai border town of Mae Sot on January 1 after three months in hiding in Yangon, the old capital and hub of the pro-democracy demonstrations.

His account of a dramatic escape to Thailand exposes as a lie the junta's assurances to United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari in November that it had stopped its arrests.

As Gambari was passing on the generals' promises to the U.N. Security Council, police were holding the man's mother for a week to force her to reveal the names, addresses and phone numbers of her son's friends and relatives, he said.

"Gambari may tell them to stop arresting people but they just carry on," he told Reuters in an interview. He asked not to be named as his wife and children remain in Yangon. She has to report to the authorities every week, he said.

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### **Bulgaria imposes restrictions against Myanmar**

February 13, Sofia News Agency

The Bulgarian government decided to impose restrictive measures against Myanmar (formerly called Burma) at its session on Wednesday by approving a respective decree of the EU Council.

The USA has also imposed similar sanctions against the Asian state. The measures have been adopted in the wake of the suppression of peaceful civic protests by the Burmese ruling military junta and the continuing human rights abuses.

Bulgarian cabinet's decision contains an update of the names of persons from the Burmese junta who are not allowed to enter Bulgaria and whose assets and funds would also be kept out of the country.

The ban for investments in Burmese state-owned enterprises owned or controlled by the regime or by people related to it is expanded.

Further restrictions are introduced with respect to the revenue sources for the Burmese regime. These include the export of machinery and equipment for the timber and timber-processing industry, the mining of metals and minerals, and of precious and semi-precious stones.

The import of products from these activities is also prohibited.

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### **Aung San Suu Kyi's party calls for 'fair political climate' in Myanmar**

Agence-France Press - 12 February 2008

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy on Tuesday urged the military government to create a "fair political climate," after the regime announced a constitutional referendum for May.

The party did not directly mention the junta's plans for a referendum, which is meant to clear the way for elections in 2010, but repeated its long-standing call for a dialogue with the junta on national reconciliation.

"The (junta) has the main responsibility to realise national reconciliation, which is essential for the country," the party said in a statement, read out by senior member Than Tun.

"Moreover, it also has the responsibility to create a fair political climate and environment," the statement added.

The party also repeated its call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest, as well as her deputy Tin Oo and 1,800 other political prisoners believed held in the country.

Tin Oo is also under house arrest, and the military is expected to announce an extension of his confinement this week.

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### **Myanmar junta says sanctions seek to derail democracy plans**

AFP - Tuesday, February 12

YANGON - Myanmar's junta leader on Tuesday accused western countries of using sanctions to derail the military's "road map" to democracy, as the regime prepares for a constitutional referendum.

"They are imposing sanctions against the nation to create a large-scale disruption to national progress," Senior General Than Shwe said in a statement read out by another military official on national television.

The regime's foes are "driving a wedge among national races, misleading the people, and aiding and abetting anti-government groups to weaken and break up the union," it said.

Than Shwe's statement also said that the people of Myanmar were "pursuing the state's seven-step road map with a solemn determination in harness with the government for a transition to a modern, developed democratic nation with flourishing discipline."

Than Shwe did not attend the ceremony himself. The 74-year-old military supremo, whose health is believed to be weakening, is rarely seen in public.

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### **Moscow praises Myanmar referendum, election plans**

RIA Novosti - 12 February 2008

MOSCOW- A national referendum on Myanmar's State Constitution will defuse international tensions around the Southeast Asian country and set it on the path to democracy, Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

Myanmar announced last week plans to hold a nationwide referendum in May 2008 and general multiparty parliamentary elections in 2010.

"Setting a clear timeframe for political reform in Myanmar, as laid out in the well-known roadmap [to democracy] and designed to ensure a transition to civilian rule, will alleviate tensions that are being ratcheted up by certain countries around the so-called Myanmar issue," the ministry said.

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### **Myanmar charter vote a first step - ASEAN**

Reuters – 12 February 2008

BANGKOK - Myanmar's ruling generals should be given the benefit of the doubt if they are serious about moving the country toward democracy, Surin Pitsuwan, chief of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said on Tuesday.

"It has to begin somewhere and now it has a clear, definite beginning," Surin said of the junta's planned May referendum on an army-written constitution, followed by elections in 2010.

"I think it is a development in the right direction," the former Thai foreign minister told Reuters on the sidelines of a business seminar in Bangkok.

Surin said the international community's growing frustration at Myanmar's intransigent generals was understandable, but he said they should be given a chance to fulfil their pledges.

"Everybody has their own agenda on the issue," said Surin, who leads one of the few international groupings that allow Myanmar into the club.

"We have to wait and see how things are going to develop and unfold. Whether these steps are going to lead to true national reconciliation which is what people inside have been asking for and the international community has been waiting for," he said.

Surin said Myanmar's announcement would be discussed by ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Singapore later this month.

"I am sure they will be very keen to ask some questions and to consult among themselves how they can contribute or help," said Surin, who was critical of Myanmar when he served as Thailand's foreign minister from 1997-2000.

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### **Singapore positive on Myanmar's move on referendum, elections**

Associated Press - 10 February 2008

SINGAPORE - Singapore's Foreign Ministry on Sunday hailed the move by Myanmar's military government to set a timeframe for a referendum on a new constitution and elections as a "positive" one.

"This is a positive development," the ministry's spokesman said in a statement.

"We hope that the Myanmar government will ensure that the political process is an inclusive one that would lead to peaceful national reconciliation in the country," he said in a statement.

Singapore is the current rotating chair of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which also groups Myanmar.

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**Myanmar announces constitutional referendum in May**

AFP – 09 February 2008

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Myanmar Activists Denounce Planned Polls**

Associated Press – 11 February 2008

YANGON, Myanmar — Two of Myanmar's top dissident groups, one led by Buddhist monks, on Monday denounced the military government's plans for a constitutional referendum as an effort to perpetuate the junta's rule.

The All Burma Monks Alliance and the Generation 88 Students group, both major organizers of last year's pro-democracy protests, said the government instead needed to hold reconciliation talks with the opposition party of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of ethnic minority groups.

The student group described the government's plans as a "declaration of war by the military regime against the people of Burma," using junta opponents' preferred name for the country.

"We're not persuaded that this is anything more than a cynical sham," said Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith.

However, some in Myanmar felt it was a small step forward.

"I will vote for the constitution as it is better to have a constitution than not having any at all," said Tint Lwin, a 57-year-old university lecturer.

"We reject and denounce the SPDC announcements as they ignore the aspirations and wishes of the people and are an attempt to perpetuate the military dictatorship," said an e-mailed statement from the All Burma Monks Alliance.

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### **Britain guarded at Myanmar election promise**

AFP - 11 January 2008

LONDON- Britain on Saturday gave a guarded response to Myanmar's announcement that a referendum would be held on a new constitution in May before multi-party elections in 2010.

"The transition to democracy in Burma requires the participation of all political stakeholders," a Foreign Office spokeswoman in London said.

Britain echoed NLD spokesman Nyan Win's surprise at the announcement, especially since no one has seen the final version of the constitution that the military plans to bring before voters.

"Political leaders in Burma have not been consulted on the constitution or the election process," the Foreign Office spokeswoman added.

"The military rulers should release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners without delay. Together they should work on the road to democracy and a secure future for Burma.

"It is imperative that there is a genuine and inclusive process of national reconciliation."

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### **Malaysia Hopes Myanmar Election Goes On As Planned**

Bernama - 11 February 2008

PUTRAJAYA,-- Malaysia hopes Myanmar's decision to hold elections in 2010 will be realised as planned and all parties will participate according to democratic practice, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar says.

He said the practice of democracy was not limited to only one model approach for it to benefit the people. "The most important in democracy is service to the people and not causing trouble," he told reporters here Monday.

Syed Hamid said he hoped Myanmar would continue to engage with United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to ensure the credibility and integrity of the roadmap to democracy and so that it would be accepted by the international community.

"How they go about it, it is up to them. The most important thing is we want the pressure on Myanmar by the international community to be taken off or reduced or minimised so that Myanmar can concentrate on development and play its role in Asean.

"Otherwise, Myanmar will always create some difficulty for Asean," he said after receiving the new United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) representative to Malaysia Youssouf Mohammed Oomar at his office.

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### **US denounces Myanmar constitutional plans**

AFP - 11 February 2008

WASHINGTON - The White House on Monday accused Myanmar's military rulers of "lack of seriousness" about democratic reforms, saying the junta excluded opposition voices ahead of a proposed constitutional referendum.

"The Burmese junta's announcement that it will hold a referendum on a new constitution in May demonstrates its lack of seriousness about an open and fair process for the restoration of democracy," said spokeswoman Dana Perino.

"The drafting process for the constitution does not incorporate the views of opposition parties or all ethnic groups, nor does this timeframe allow for adequate debate on the pros and cons of the proposed constitution, which has not yet been shared with the Burmese public," she told reporters.

Perino cited news reports as saying Aung San Suu Kyi might be barred from running, and stressed: "The problem is not with the setting of a date for elections, but with a non-transparent and exclusive process."

"We call on the Burmese government to comply with the United Nations call last October that this be an open and inclusive process that allows all of the Burmese people a fair say in the structure and form of their new government," said Perino.

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**Statement Attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Myanmar**  
New York, 11 February 2008

The announcement by the Myanmar Government that it plans to hold a constitutional referendum in May and "multi-party democratic elections" by 2010 marks the first establishment of a timeframe for the implementation of its "political roadmap process."

In light of this announcement, the Secretary-General renews his call to the Myanmar authorities to make the constitution-making process inclusive, participatory and transparent in order to ensure that any draft constitution is broadly representative of the views of all the people of Myanmar.

In this regard, he believes it is now all the more important for the Myanmar leadership to engage without delay in a substantive and time-bound dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other relevant parties to the national reconciliation process. The UN remains ready to continue to support this process with the cooperation of the parties concerned.

The Secretary-General believes this latest development also makes it essential that a visit to Myanmar by his Special Adviser, Ibrahim Gambari, be allowed to proceed without further delay.

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**Suu Kyi's party invites pro-junta ethnic groups for talks**  
Agence France Presse - 05 February 2008

Aung San Suu Kyi's pro-democracy party on Tuesday invited ethnic minority groups that support Myanmar's ruling junta to meet at its headquarters for talks on resolving their differences.

The rare gesture by the National League for Democracy (NLD) came less than a week after party leaders were allowed to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 12 of the last 18 years.

Aung San Suu Kyi in November had released a statement through visiting UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari, calling for national unity and saying she had a

particular duty to consider the opinions of Myanmar's dozens of ethnic minority groups.

Many of the country's ethnic groups have waged armed struggles for decades against the junta, seeking autonomy for their peoples.

Some of the groups that have signed ceasefires and aligned themselves with the military government issued statements in state media saying that Aung San Suu Kyi had no right to speak on their behalf.

In a statement Tuesday, the NLD invited those groups to gather at the party's headquarters to work on resolving their differences.

"The NLD invites those ethnic national parties and organisations who had different views on the statement (by Aung San Suu Kyi) to come and discuss their opinions at the NLD headquarters in Yangon," it said.

Aung San Suu Kyi "has said dutifully and faithfully that the NLD is focused on the welfare of all ethnic nationalities and the union (of Myanmar) as a whole," the statement said.

"The NLD understands that their freely made opinions and denunciations are part of democratic practise. Likewise, bilateral discussion is the essence of democracy," it said.

Last week Aung San Suu Kyi also called for tripartite talks bringing together the NLD, the junta and the ethnic minorities.

The NLD won a landslide election victory in 1990, but the junta never allowed it to take office.

The military opened talks with Aung San Suu Kyi in the wake of a violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests in September, but so far little visible progress has been made.

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### **UN Rights Expert Dismayed Over Continued Arrests, Detentions**

UN News Center - 05 February 2008

Nearly five months after Myanmar's forceful crackdown on peaceful protesters, political and human rights activists continue to be arrested, detained and sentenced to prison, an independent United Nations expert said today.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, also voiced concern about the well-being of those being detained.

"Reports have been received expressing serious concerns regarding the health conditions of some of the prisoners who require immediate care and specific medication," Mr. Pinheiro said in a statement issued today in Geneva.

Calling the ongoing prosecutions "a flagrant abuse" of people's right to a free and fair trial in accordance with internationally recognized standards, he stressed that the Government has "a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

The Special Rapporteur visited Myanmar last November to verify allegations of abuses during the Government crackdown in the summer of 2007, determine the numbers and whereabouts of those detained or killed, and collect testimony about what happened.

He found that at least 31 people died during the crackdown – 16 more than had been acknowledged by the Government – and that between 3,000 and 4,000 people were arrested in September and October.

The UN Human Rights Council, to which Mr. Pinheiro reports, has requested him to conduct a follow-up mission to look into ongoing human rights violations before the Council's next session in March.

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**US expands sanctions on Myanmar regime family, tycoon**

AFP - 05 February 2008

WASHINGTON - The United States said Tuesday it was tightening financial sanctions against a network tied to Myanmar's military junta, citing continuing human rights violations and political repression.

The Treasury Department said its action targets the financial network of Tay Za, identifying him as a "Burmese business tycoon and regime henchman" who is an arms dealer with "close ties" to Myanmar's military junta.

Also affected are family members of regime leaders and key additional individuals and businesses that are part of Tay Za's financial network, the department said in a statement.

"We are tightening financial sanctions against Tay Za, an arms dealer and financial henchman of Burma's repressive junta," said Adam Szubin, director of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

President George W. Bush "has made clear that we will continue to take action against the military junta and those who prop it up so long as human rights violations continue and democracy is suppressed," Szubin said.

Bush recently warned the United States would spearhead a global campaign to step up sanctions against Myanmar's military regime if it continues to ignore calls for a democratic transition.

The Treasury said that the action targets Tay Za's Htoo Group of Companies, which carries out key projects on behalf of Myanmar's junta, including the purchase of military equipment and aircraft for the its military.

Among the individuals named Tuesday is Aung Thet Mann, a director of Tay Za's Htoo Group of Companies.

Aung Thet Mann is the son of General Thura Shwe Mann, a senior official in the government and a member of the State Peace and Development Council, the Treasury said.

"Tay Za has used his business relationship with Aung Thet Mann to win favorable business contracts from the Burmese junta," the department said.

OFAC also designated Thiha, Tay Za's brother and business partner, and U Kyaw Thein, a director of Tay Za's business ventures in Singapore.

The companies designated include Myanmar Avia Export Company Ltd., Ayer Shwe Wah Company Limited and Pavo Aircraft Leasing Pte. Ltd. in Singapore.

Four spouses of senior government officials have also been named:

Khin Lay Thet, the wife of General Thura Shwe Mann; Myint Myint Ko, the wife of Construction Minister Saw Tun; Tin Lin Myint, the wife of Lieutenant-General Ye Myint; and Myint Myint Soe, the wife of Foreign Affairs Minister Nyan Win.

The department's designation action against the individuals and firms freezes any assets they may have under US jurisdiction and bars Americans from conducting business with them at the risk of heavy fines and prison time.

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### **Myanmar: Junta pressures ethnic ceasefire groups on China border**

Irrawaddy – 02 February 2008

Burma's regime is stepping up its efforts to persuade armed ethnic groups to become more involved in its political reform program, even as it stalls in its talks with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Senior Burmese military leaders are pressuring ethnic ceasefire groups based along the border with China to disarm and support a national referendum, which is part of the regime's seven-point "road map" to democracy.

Recently, two senior leaders of the ruling junta, Maj-Gen Khin Aung Myint, Minister for culture, and Lt-Gen Ye Myint, head of Military Affairs Security, visited the Burma-China border, where they held talks with Wa, Kachin, Shan and Kokang armed insurgent groups, according to Aung Kyaw Zaw, a Burmese analyst based on the Chinese border.

Lt-Gen Ye Myint has been traveling around the area since January 24, meeting with leaders of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the Shan State Army (North) and the Kokang Army.

The Burmese generals were trying to persuade leaders of the border-based ceasefire groups to form political parties so they could run in future general elections, said the Burmese analyst. But the regime didn't say when elections would be held.

Meanwhile, Maj-Gen Khin Aung Myint, who is also a leading member of the regime's "Spokes Authoritative Team," held a meeting with Kachin leaders from the KIO. This is his second trip in recent months.

The regime has officially announced that the first two stages of its "seven-step road map" have been completed, leaving only five more stages to go before the country makes its transition to a "disciplined democracy".

The next step is the drafting of a new constitution, with subsequent steps including the holding of a referendum, formation of a people's assembly, and general elections.

Maj Sai Lao Hseng, a spokesperson for the Shan State Army (South), which continues to engage in armed conflict with the regime, said that he believed the regime would continue to push the armed groups to disarm and support a new constitution and referendum.

However, Sai Lao Hseng added that several ceasefire group leaders might reject the junta's requests to disarm. A number of ceasefire groups have attended the regime's National Convention, which first convened in 1993.

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### **Bush administration expected to request boost in funding for Myanmar**

Associated Press - 02 February 2008

WASHINGTON: President George W. Bush on Monday is expected to propose a boost in funding for Myanmar in his annual budget request.

Bush will likely request nearly \$16 million (€11 million) be targeted toward the military-led Southeast Asian country, a large jump from the nearly \$5 million requested last year, according to a congressional aide familiar with the proposal.

Monday's request by the Bush administration will be the start of a long budget process. The Senate and the House of Representatives must make their own recommendations on funding; negotiators from each side would then hammer out a compromise bill before sending it to the president to sign into law.

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**PM defends government business with Myanmar**

The New Zealand Herald - 03 February 2008

Prime Minister Helen Clark says work done by a New Zealand state owned enterprise in Myanmar would probably help democracy.

National has criticised Government broadcast and telecommunications business Kordia doing business in military ruled Myanmar.

National foreign affairs spokesman Murray McCully said yesterday the Government had "tantrums" over Air New Zealand carrying Australian troops to the Iraq war and imposed sanctions on Fiji after it was taken over by a military regime.

"It is hard to reconcile these actions with the decision to allow a wholly taxpayer-owned company to carry out engineering work for the Butchers of Burma, especially when it is likely that the communications facilities they are constructing will be used as a tool for the continued suppression of the Burmese people," Mr McCully said.

Miss Clark told Breakfast on TV One that the contract was small -- worth about \$80,000 -- and related to putting up cellphone towers.

"Quite frankly I think that's probably an aid to democracy in Myanmar, not a step backwards, because one of the ways of getting news out to the world and photos and images out to the world is precisely through that technology."

Kordia had not run the contract by the government, she said.

"But if it had they would probably have had the response that there are no economic sanctions on Myanmar."

Miss Clark said she could not see how the contract was detrimental to democracy and there was "no way" that the company would be allowed to export military parts for example.