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## **BURMA - World weekly news round-up #29: 3 March 2008 – 12 March 2008**

### **Inside Burma**

During the UN's Special Envoy to Burma's most recent visit to the country, the Burmese military has rudely rejected all the suggested steps towards national reconciliation. The military regime will not amend their draft constitution and it will continue with its seven step roadmap to democracy without changes. (Date: 8 March 2008. Source: Xinhua [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/08/content\\_7741192.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/08/content_7741192.htm))

Buddhist monks in Mandalay have launched a poster campaign urging Burmese citizens to vote against the military regime's constitutional referendum. The All Burma Monks Alliance has also issued a strong statement against the military regime, ridiculing both the referendum and the 2010 election. (Date: 4 March 2008. Source: The Irrawaddy [http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=10698](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=10698))

Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), have failed in their attempt to sue the military government for not recognizing the 1990 election result. The NLD took the case to the Supreme Court in Burma on the grounds that the military had failed to abide by their own law to convene an elected parliament after the 1990 elections. The case was rejected the same day without a hearing. (Date: 5 March 2008. Source: AFP <http://tinyurl.com/2k5p3x>)

Rumors are circulating in Yangon that Than Shwe, the number one Burmese General has been hospitalised and that his health is failing. Burma's Ministry of Information has refuted these claims. (Date: 12 March 2008. Source: Mizzima: <http://mizzima.com/MizzimaNews/News/2008/Mar/43-Mar-2008.html>)

### **UN**

The UN's special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, left Rangoon with little to show for after his most recent visit to the country. The military regime rejected all his substantive recommendations, including the involvement of Aung San Suu Kyi and the opposition in the constitutional drafting process. They also refused the UN's offer of observers for May's constitutional referendum and elections in 2010. In two meetings with the government spokesman, General Kyaw Hsan, the military effectively humiliated the UN envoy. In the first meeting, the General admonished Gambari for showing favoritism to Aung San Suu Kyi and in the second meeting, the General brushed off the special envoy's recommendations as pointless and unnecessary. (Date: 13 March 2008. Source: The Bangkok Post [http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/13Mar2008\\_news94.php](http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/13Mar2008_news94.php) & Date: 9 March 2008. Source: Reuters <http://tinyurl.com/33nwsu>)

The UN's independent expert on human rights in Burma has issued a report admonishing the Burmese military for "accelerating" the amount of unlawful arrests of activists made since the crackdown on pro-democracy protests last September. According to the report by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, 1,850 political prisoners are still illegally imprisoned in Burmese jails, which indicates the regime's complete unwillingness to address human rights abuses. (Date: 12 March 2008. Source: AFP [http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080312/wl\\_asia\\_afp/unrightsmyanmar](http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080312/wl_asia_afp/unrightsmyanmar))

### **ILO**

The International Labour Organisation has agreed to extend its Memorandum of Understanding with the regime for 12 months. The deal is aimed at compensating victims of forced labour, but the regime has been slow to raise the deal's profile in the country. As a result only 74 claims have been made in the last 12 months. (Date: 12 March 2008. Source: AFP <http://tinyurl.com/2qk8vx>)

### **ASEAN**

Further to the Burmese military's rejection of UN election observers, President Gloria Macapagal of the Philippines has 'advised' them to reconsider their decision and has urged the regime to accept the UN's "modest proposal". (Date: 9 March 2008. Source: GMANews.TV <http://tinyurl.com/3c3rvb>)

Regional civil society activists meeting in Jakarta condemned the Burmese military regime's constitutional referendum as "illegitimate" and urged ASEAN leaders not to recognize it unless steps are taken to ensure a fair voting process. (Date: 7 March 2008. Source: AFP <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storyPage.aspx?storyId=111511>)

**India**

The Burmese military's number two general, Maung Aye, will travel to India next month to sign a deal for a large transport project between the two countries. It is rare for the second general to travel on his own outside Burma, which could be an indication of change in the upper levels of the Burmese military. (Date: 9 March 2008. Source: The Times of India <http://tinyurl.com/35kqan>)

**Belgium**

The Belgian authorities have dropped a legal case that had been reopened last October in which Burmese refugees accused Total of having used forced labour to build a gas pipeline. (Date: 5 March 2008. Source: AFP <http://tinyurl.com/35g7ss>)