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## WEEKLY NEWS UPDATE NO. 79

### **Inside Burma**

#### **Elections**

While many international observers and Burmese dissidents have condemned the military government's plan to hold a general election this year, several veteran Burmese politicians, former political prisoners and student activists have expressed support for this year's election. At the "Burma Affairs Forum", an informal political meeting in Rangoon on 16 January, about 50 participants including student activists and politicians who intend to contest this year's election discussed the pros and cons and the issues surrounding the proposed election.

In December 2009, Euro-Burma Office said it will provide financial support to opposition parties and ethnic groups that will contest the general election if they need support, according to Executive Director Harn Yawngnwe. The aim of supporting those groups is to let them strive for democracy and ethnic rights within any political space that might be opened up by the Burmese regime, he said. Many exiled dissidents and international observers have denounced the planned election as a "sham" designed to entrench the junta's rule and have called for a boycott of the election. - [Irrawaddy](#) – 19 January 2010

*Further election-related articles of interest:*

[Election 'preparation' barred from media](#) - [DVB](#) – 20 January 2010

[Frustration grows over delayed election law](#) - [Mizzima](#) - 18 January 2010

[New Anti-Terrorism Law a Threat to the Opposition](#) - [Irrawaddy](#) – 20 January 2010

[USDA intensifies organizational work](#) - [Mizzima](#) - 18 January 2010

[Electoral Law May Disqualify Existing Parties](#) - [Chinland Guardian](#) - 18 January 2010

[Ethnic Leaders Reject Election](#) - [Irrawaddy](#) – 14 January 2010

[2010 Election: Buddhist Monk and Youth Arrested, Tortured](#) - [Kaowao](#) – 14 January 2010

[Burma pledges free election](#) - [DVB/ AFP](#) – 14 January 2010

#### **Aung San Suu Kyi meets junta's liaison minister, Court hears final appeal**

Aung San Suu Kyi met with government liaison minister Aung Kyi at her house on 15 January, according to NLD party leaders, although it is not known what the two discussed. Suu Kyi last met with Aung Kyi in December, who was appointed by Than Shwe as an interlocutor between himself and Aung San Suu Kyi in 2007, following the visit of the then United Nations Special Envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, and September's Saffron Revolution. - [Mizzima](#) - 15 January 2010

Burma's Supreme Court heard final arguments on 18 January against the extended house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, who was ordered to spend another 18 months in detention in August after being convicted over an incident in which a US man swam to her house. A lower court rejected an initial appeal in October, and now, according to Suu Kyi's main lawyer, a decision is expected within a month from the Supreme Court. If the appeal is rejected, it is thought that Suu Kyi and her lawyers would have to appeal directly to the military government to try to get the conviction overturned. - [AFP / DVB](#) – 18 January 2010

[Western envoys at Suu Kyi hearing](#) - [DVB](#) – 19 January 2010

[Japan calls for Suu Kyi's release](#) - [DVB](#) – 18 January 2010

### **NLD plans to form new Central Committee**

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has taken the next step in its ongoing effort to revitalize itself - the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) held its first meeting on 18 January since adding nine new members a week earlier and resolved to reorganize its second-line leadership in the Central Committee (CC). The move comes just one week after the party's first major internal shake-up since it was founded in 1988. On 11 January, the CEC chose nine new members—all in their 60s and 70s—expanding its total membership to 20. According to the party spokesman, when the new CC is formed, it will consist of 80 to 120 members from all of the country's states and divisions, adding that the party hasn't had a CC since 1991, when it was abolished under orders from the ruling junta. - [Irrawaddy](#) – 20 January 2010

### **Uneasy calm prevails between junta and ceasefire groups**

Despite the refusal of armed ceasefire groups to favourably respond to the junta's proposal to transform their armies into Border Guard Forces (BGFs), the situation is tense but calm. According to a military analyst, while there are no visible tensions between the junta and armed ceasefire groups, the junta continues to secretly prepare for their next move. In April 2009, Burma's military rulers proposed that all seventeen armed ceasefire groups transform their armies into BGFs administered by the junta. Though a few groups accepted the proposal, many bigger armed groups have not yet accepted the proposal, leaving the junta's plan stalled. The junta had set a deadline of October 2009 for all ceasefire groups to make the necessary change, but following the rejection of numerous groups they were forced to extend the deadline to the end of 2009. - [Mizzima](#) - 20 January 2010

[BGF talks on hold, junta and Wa at impasse](#) - [Mizzima](#) - 15 January 2010

[Arms Smuggling, Anti-junta Activities Discussed](#) - [Irrawaddy](#) – 14 January 2010

[Junta Recruits Forcibly to Form People's Militia to Harass KIA](#) - [Kachin News Group](#) - 14 January 2010

### **US citizen reportedly in solitary confinement, while courts rush to conclude trials and 8 are charged for roles in Saffron Revolution in 2007**

The Burmese-born US citizen Kyaw Zaw Lwin (aka Nyi Nyi Aung) detained in Rangoon's Insein prison has been placed in solitary confinement, along with two other inmates, according to prison sources. Reports surfaced on 22 December that he had been moved to Insein prison's so-called 'dog cells', where conditions are notoriously poor, after staging a hunger strike. (See [Weekly News #78](#) for more info)- [DVB](#) – 20 January 2010

The special courts inside Insein prison are said to be in a hurry to complete trials against more than 20 political activists within a month, according to lawyers defending activists. Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer believes that the reason behind the hurriedly conducted trials against activists could be because of the fast-approaching 2010 elections. In addition, 8 activists, including four monks and a school teacher, have been charged for their role in the September 2007 uprisings, more than two years after police in Burma launched a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests. - [Mizzima](#) - 19 January 2010 & [DVB](#) – 21 January 2010

[Three activists sentenced to three years each](#) - [Mizzima](#) - 13 January 2010

### **India holds talks with Burma, urges hunt for Northeastern militants**

Indian home Secretary G K Pillai arrived in Naypyidaw on 19 January to hold secretary level talks between India and Burma. The three-day talks were expected to include extensive interaction on cooperation in counter-terrorism and curbing transnational crimes, an exchange views on sharing intelligence, and India's ongoing problem with its Northeastern states. There have been recent revelations that certain groups, notably the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), are taking shelter in Burma, particularly in Kachin state which borders China. There are also claims that the ULFA has ties to the Burmese ceasefire group, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Pillai's visit follows an announcement that the Indian paramilitary group, the Assam Rifles, is deploying a further 26 battalions to its porous Burma border to combat the militants.

Other issues on the agenda included the fence along the Indian-Burmese border which had been delayed due to the lack of a clearly demarcated boundary line. There are also plans to "seal" the entire 1600km border, according to the Times of India newspaper, since attempts by both India and Burma to control and develop the inaccessible and mountainous terrain have proved fruitless. The regional implications of talks and of India's major security concerns also impinge on China. India has on several occasions alleged that Chinese arms are finding their way through Burma to the border rebels. - *DVB – 20 January 2010 & ANI - 17 January 2010*

[Indian paramilitaries to reinforce Burma border](#) - *DVB – 14 January 2010*

### **Rohingya continue to face problems on both sides of border**

Arakanese Rohingyas are facing movement restriction in border areas of Bangladesh from since the Rohingya Resistance Committee (RRC) declared they would be arrested in town and on the road, according to a NGO member in Teknaf. Those affected are mostly day labourers who live in Teknaf and along the border area. - *Kaladan Press Network - 19 January 2010*

On the Burmese side of the Burma-Bangladesh border, an army battalion has ordered villagers to supply a monthly quote rations since the beginning of this year, which some are finding difficult to do as they are very poor. - *Kaladan Press Network - 19 January 2010*

[12 Bangladesh Pilgrims Sentenced to Six Months in Burmese Prison](#) - *Narinjara News - 17 January 2010*  
[Anti-Rohingya rally in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazaar district](#) - *Kaladan Press / BNI - 14 January 2010*  
[BDR pushes back 17 Rohingyas to Burma](#) - *Kaladan Press - 13 January 2010*

### **Further articles of interest:**

[Burma Strengthens Relations with Asean Chair Vietnam](#) - *Irrawaddy – 21 January 2010*

[Is War Office Reshuffle Related to Info Leak?](#) - *Irrawaddy – 16 January 2010*

[Burma Could be 'Rice Bowl of Asia Again': MRIA](#) - *Irrawaddy – 18 January 2010*

[Rice Price Increases Halt after Ministry Appeal](#) - *Irrawaddy – 13 January 2010*

### **Outside Burma**

#### **US 'needs clear steps' on Burma reform**

The US has signalled a growing impatience with the Burmese regime after complaining that it had received a "mixed bag" of results following its decision to engage government. Washington's top Asia-Pacific official, Kurt Campbell, also said that a follow-up meeting to the one he held with the junta in November last year was on the cards. The US government last year announced a shift away from its policy of isolating the junta in favour of engagement, although it has maintained tough sanctions on the military generals. - *DVB – 20 January 2010*

**ILO extends forced labour ‘understanding’**

The International Labour Organisation has agreed to the extension of a ‘supplementary understanding’ with the Burmese government regarding the illegal use of forced labour in the country. The organisation’s deputy head, Kari Tapiola, visited Burma to secure the extension of the agreement that looks to ensure victims of forced labour are free to lodge complaints without recrimination from the military government. The ILO has struggled since the first supplementary understanding was signed in February 2007 to curb the use of forced labour, which includes land disputes and recruitment of child soldiers, by the Burmese government. It has also expressed “serious concern” about the jailing of labour activists and forced labour complainants. - *DVB – 20 January 2010*

**Human Rights Watch report: human rights 'deteriorating' in Burma**

According to Human Rights Watch’s (HRW) World Report 2010, Burma's human rights record continued to deteriorate in 2009 ahead of scheduled elections in 2010. "The Burmese military junta systematically denies citizens basic freedoms, including freedom of expression, association and assembly", said the report. The report criticised the fact that there are currently an estimated 2,100 political prisoners incarcerated for their peaceful activities in Burma. It also criticized the Burmese armed forces saying that “the military continues to perpetrate violations against civilians in ethnic conflict areas, including extrajudicial killings, forced labor and sexual violence” and expressed concern about internally displaced people, refugees and child soldiers. It added that despite the growth in the human rights movement, human rights defenders remain vulnerable and greatly in need of support by rights-respecting governments. - *Irrawaddy – 21 January 2010*

*Junta urged to act against rights violators - Mizzima - 19 January 2010*

*Report: Human Rights Watch – World Report 2010*

**Further articles of interest:**

*Migrant passport deadline extended - DVB – 18 January 2010*

*IOM helps resettle over 17,000 refugees in 2009 from Thailand - Mizzima - 13 January 2010*