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### Clinton sends condolences over deadly China quake

Thu Mar 10, 7:17 pm ET

WASHINGTON (AFP) – Top US diplomat Hillary Clinton offered her “deepest condolences” Thursday after an earthquake that struck a remote area of southwest China near the Myanmar border left at least 25 people dead.

At least 250 people also were injured in the quake, which reduced hundreds of houses to rubble, left some desperate residents trapped under buildings and triggered power cuts in the surrounding area of China. No casualties were reported in Myanmar.

“On behalf of President (Barack) Obama and the people of the United States, I send our deepest condolences to those affected by the recent tragedy in southwestern China,” Clinton said in a statement.

“As people in Yunnan province mourn the loss of life and work to save those that are injured and trapped in the rubble, our thoughts are with the injured, the families of the victims, and with all the people of China.”

The epicenter of the 5.4-magnitude quake, which struck at 12:58 pm (0458 GMT), was located about 140 miles (225 kilometers) west-southwest of the ancient city of Dali in Yunnan province, the US Geological Survey reported.

The quake hit at a depth of 21 miles (34 kilometers), the USGS said, though Chinese seismologists put the depth at just six miles (10 kilometers).

The toll has risen to 25 dead and 250 injured, 134 of them seriously, Xinhua news agency said, citing local authorities.

The quake toppled the homes of 1,039 families and seriously damaged nearly 5,000 others, mostly in the border town of Yingjiang, it added.

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### Toppled buildings in China quake raise questions

By GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press – Fri Mar 11, 6:23 am ET

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BURMA RELATED NEWS – MARCH 19-21, 2011

EBO’s 10th Political Monitor

BEIJING – A moderately strong earthquake that left 25 dead in southwestern China displaced nearly half the county's people and raised questions among experts Friday about whether structures had been built to code.

More than 3,600 houses were destroyed and 11,300 badly damaged after Thursday's earthquake struck a mountainous area in Yunnan province, near the border with Myanmar, the Civil Affairs Ministry said on its website. Parts of a supermarket and a hotel also buckled and fell.

More than 127,000 of Yingjiang county's 300,000 people have been displaced by the temblor which Chinese authorities measured at a magnitude 5.8.

Search efforts continued Friday but the chances of finding more people alive were shrinking, said Jin Guangwei, an official from the Yunnan disaster relief center. Officials were now focusing on treating the injured, relocating survivors and distributing relief materials, he said.

"Many of the buildings in the area were constructed with low earthquake resistance and so they fell easily," Jin said.

Unsafe construction is a chronic problem in China and is often blamed on poor planning, shoddy work or the theft of materials. The deaths of many students whose schools collapsed during a catastrophic earthquake in Sichuan province in 2008 triggered complaints from parents and others who accused builders of cutting corners to increase profits.

The Civil Affairs Ministry said 25 people were killed in Yingjiang, while another 250 people were injured — 134 of them seriously. The official Xinhua News Agency said the central government has allocated 55 million yuan (\$8.4 million) to the region for quake relief.

Survivors spent the night in tents while seven aftershocks measuring up to 4.7 in magnitude shook the town, state media reported. CCTV showed people eating meals cooked in large pots over portable stoves in the morning next to tents set up in a public square.

The buildings in Yingjiang, in quake-prone Yunnan, should have been constructed to resist earthquakes much stronger than Thursday's, said Wang Yayong, a chief engineering adviser at the Chinese Academy of Building Research in Beijing.

If the seismic building codes had been strictly followed, "or if they had made any conscious effort at all to strengthen the houses, then the houses should not have just collapsed like that," Wang said.

However, Wang also noted that the shallow depth of the quake, which struck from six miles (10 kilometers) below the surface, did exacerbate its impact. "It means that the earthquake is very close and has catastrophic impact on the ground."

Many of the injured were being treated by medical staff on a basketball court outside Yingjiang county's overcrowded hospital, CCTV footage showed. People with bandaged heads sat in chairs and were hooked up to intravenous drips, while others lay on blankets on the ground.

There was no word Friday from authorities across the border in Myanmar.

The Myanmar Meteorological Department released a statement Thursday saying a quake had hit 230 miles (370 kilometers) northeast of Mandalay. The statement did not mention injuries or damage. Authorities in the tightly ruled country tend not to immediately discuss the effects of natural disasters.

More than 1,000 soldiers have been sent to aid in rescue efforts while thousands of tents, quilts and coats were being sent from the central government, state media said.

Xinhua said the quake-prone region has been hit by more than 1,000 minor tremors over the past two months.

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## **China quake brought down 18,000 homes; killed 25**

**By GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press – Fri Mar 11, 4:58 am ET**

BEIJING (AP) – China's state media is reporting that a moderately strong earthquake in the southwest topped more than 18,000 houses and apartment buildings.

Thursday's temblor left 25 dead in a mountainous area in Yunnan province, near the border with Myanmar.

More than 127,000 of Yingjiang county's 300,000 people have been displaced by the temblor which Chinese authorities measured at a magnitude 5.8.

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BEIJING (AP) — The moderately strong earthquake that left 25 dead in southwestern China displaced nearly half the county's people and raised questions among experts Friday about whether structures had been built to code.

More than 1,000 houses and apartment buildings, and parts of a supermarket and a hotel, buckled and fell after Thursday's earthquake struck a mountainous area in Yunnan province, near the border with Myanmar. More than 127,000 of Yingjiang county's 300,000 people have been displaced by the temblor which Chinese authorities measured at a magnitude 5.8.

Search efforts continued Friday but the chances of finding more people alive were shrinking, said Jin Guangwei, an official from the Yunnan disaster relief center. Officials were now focusing on treating the injured, relocating survivors and distributing relief materials, he said.

"Many of the buildings in the area were constructed with low earthquake resistance and so they fell easily," Jin said.

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Xinhua said the quake-prone region has been hit by more than 1,000 minor tremors over the past two months.

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### **Bloomberg – Myanmar to Resume Rice Exports After Harvest Starts, FAO Says By Supunnabul Suwannakij – Mar 10, 2011 6:58 PM PT**

Myanmar will probably resume rice exports after the new harvest starts in April, according to the United Nations' Food & Agriculture Organization.

"The export ban is a seasonal adjustment every year to keep enough stock before harvest begins next month," said Hiroyuki Konuma, the FAO's regional representative in Asia.

"When the Myanmar harvest starts, then I'm sure they won't continue the ban," Konuma said late yesterday after a meeting with Myanmar delegates during a conference in Bangkok.

Myanmar suspended exports from the last week of February to ensure rice prices are not driven higher

by shortages, Associated Press reported on March 3, citing a rice exporter who spoke on condition of anonymity. Khin Hla Thein, deputy director of the Planning Department, under the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, declined to comment.

The export restriction “has nothing to do with the international market,” Konuma said. There was no specific food price increase in Myanmar, he added.

Myanmar is estimated to export 500,000 tons this year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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### **Scoop – Comedians stand up for Zarganar**

Friday, 11 March 2011, 2:11 pm

Press Release: Amnesty International

Top line New Zealand comedians Michele A’Court and Jeremy Elwood join Amnesty International to speak out about the imprisonment of fellow Burmese comedian Zarganar – an Amnesty Prisoner of Conscience who was arrested on 4 June 2008, after he criticised the government’s handling of the cyclone relief situation in interviews with foreign journalists.

The plight of this comic, who really did stand up to authority, is at the heart of THIS PRISON WHERE I LIVE, a feature documentary that tells Zarganar’s story and follows a fellow comedian from Europe, Michael Mittermeier, who heads to Burma to find out more about this remarkable man.

Stand up for your right to laugh and join Amnesty, Michele and Jeremy for the screening of this fabulous film that highlights the importance of freedom of expression not only to human rights, but to comedy itself.

When: Sunday 20 March, 7:30pm-10pm

Where: The Classic Comedy Club and Bar, 321 Queen St, Auckland

Tickets: Adult \$20 Student \$15

For all booking enquiries: call 09 373 4321 or email [info@comedy.co.nz](mailto:info@comedy.co.nz)

For information contact: Amanda Brydon phone 09 303 4520 or email [refugee.intern@amnesty.org.nz](mailto:refugee.intern@amnesty.org.nz)

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Date: 11/03/2011

### **Europa – Commissioner Georgieva visits refugee camps in Thailand to address evolving needs of refugees from Myanmar**

Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, International Cooperation and Crisis Response, will arrive in Thailand on Saturday. She will visit camps hosting refugees from Myanmar and will discuss with the Royal Thai Government the concrete measures to build a sustainable future for the refugees.

“Right now, the world’s attention is focusing on another humanitarian emergency – that in Northern Africa, but we cannot lose sight of these other places, such as Thailand, where humanitarian needs persist and where we have the chance to be part of the solution,” Commissioner Georgieva said ahead of her trip. “For the last 20 years, Thailand has graciously provided asylum to the people fleeing violence in their native Myanmar. During my trip, I will express Europe’s appreciation for this positive role, and will continue the dialogue on finding durable solutions for the refugees,” she emphasized.

Commissioner Georgieva will travel to the Mae Sot – Mae La camp in Western Thailand on 13 March. She will visit projects providing healthcare and food assistance funded by the European Commission as well as projects that improve refugees’ self-reliance. The Commissioner will meet with the local authorities, refugee representatives and partner organisations.

On 14 March in Bangkok, Commissioner Georgieva will meet with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya, with whom she will discuss the Thai government’s active work on improving refugees’ access to education, justice and economic activities. The Commissioner will reiterate the European Union’s support for a long-term solution and will underline the importance of moving from hand-out relief to sustainable livelihood solutions for the refugees.

#### Background

Today, over 140,000 refugees from Myanmar live in nine camps in Thailand. The European Commission is among the largest donors to the camps and since 1995 has provided, including this 2011 funding, €149 million: €103m of humanitarian funding and €46m through other longer-term

assistance budgets. Over the same period, the Commission has also provided €132 million of humanitarian support within Myanmar.

Including Member States' donors (DFID, SIDA, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom), the European Union has been providing € 23 million per year since 2007 in humanitarian aid to the refugee camps in Thailand. This is more than half of the overall humanitarian support to the refugees and displaced along the border.

The European humanitarian assistance covers food support, basic healthcare, water and sanitation. Essential food aid is provided to over 65,000 refugees, and 100,000 benefit from basic medical services. The projects that receive financing from the European Union are implemented primarily through international non-governmental organisations and UNHCR.

To ensure that refugees get not only immediate support, but also a chance for a better future and greater self-reliance, the European Commission plans to gradually refocus its aid to camp residents – from humanitarian relief toward more sustainable support.

The European Commission allocated €110,000 to the Thai Red Cross to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to people affected by the floods which inundated the north-eastern and central provinces of Thailand in August and September 2010.

Footage and photos of Commissioner Georgieva's visit will be available on EbS.

For more info

For information on the European Commission's humanitarian support for refugees in Thailand:

[http://ec.europa.eu/echo/aid/asia/thailand\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/aid/asia/thailand_en.htm)

Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva's website:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/georgieva/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/georgieva/index_en.htm)

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### **ReliefWeb – Applying the Ethnic Rebellion Model and Risk Assessment Model to Conflict in Myanmar**

Source: Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS)

Date: 11 Mar 2011

Full\_Report ([http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-8EU7BA/\\$File/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-8EU7BA/$File/full_report.pdf)) (pdf\* format – 667 Kbytes)

One of the salient policy recommendations for conflict and genocide prevention is the use of early warning models. This NTS Insight investigates and applies two well-known models used for conflict and genocide risk assessments to test the impact of Myanmar's Border Guard Force (BGF) policy on the ongoing internal ethnic conflict. The two models used are the Ethnic Rebellion Model (ERM) (Harff and Gurr, 1998) and the Risk Assessment Model (RAM) for Genocides or Politicides (Harff, 2003). The application of these models shows that the internal ethnic conflict is likely to continue and there exist trigger or accelerating factors for genocide to occur. While there is utility in applying these models, this NTS Insight also identifies some gaps in and challenges with these models, which need to be addressed if they are to become effective conflict and genocide prevention assessments.

By Lina Gong, Manpavan Kaur and Alistair D.B. Cook.

Full\_Report([http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-8EU7BA/\\$File/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MUMA-8EU7BA/$File/full_report.pdf)) (pdf\* format – 667 Kbytes)

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### **The Irrawaddy – Locals Unhappy About Ancient Pagoda's Golden Facelift**

By NA YEE LIN LATT Friday, March 11, 2011

The Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda, a revered Buddhist religious monument in northern Burma's Sagaing Division, has become the latest victim of the ruling regime's meddling with national heritage sites, according to local residents.

The pagoda, which has been undergoing renovations since January, is expected to emerge from its facelift a bright golden hue after centuries of pristine whiteness. Local people say the transformation, ordered by the country's top general, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, will destroy its historic character and diminish its magnificence.

A poet living in Mandalay said that because of the pagoda's religious and historical significance, the

public, senior monks and scholars should have been consulted before the changes were made.

“This is not the same thing as slapping a coat of paint on an ordinary pagoda along the roadside,” he said. “Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda’s white color represents purity, and brings tranquility to those who behold it.”

According to local rumors, the decision to paint the pagoda gold originated with Than Shwe’s wife, Kyaing Kyaing, who wanted the change of color for “magical” reasons.

Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda, which was built by King Thalun in 1636, is recognized as one of Burma’s most important ancient pagodas. However, according to Nyi Zay Min, a well-known writer on Burmese history, some of its features will be obscured by the makeover, which he said served no purpose.

“In my opinion, I’d like to keep it as it is. There was a reason Burmese kings didn’t cover every pagoda with gold, and it wasn’t because they couldn’t afford to. White pagodas are sublime to look at, and are not held in lower esteem just because of their color,” he said.

He added that the authorities should only try to restore such structures to their original glory, not try to “improve” them.

Others agreed that fundamentally altering the appearance of ancient sites reduced their value in the eyes of many.

“Foreign tourists want to see ancient architecture in its original form. That’s why, for example, the Cambodian government has been very careful about its restoration of Angkor Wat,” said one tour guide from Mandalay.

“I often take tourists to prominent pagodas around Sagaing and Mandalay, but now I don’t what I will say to them about Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda,” he added.

The renovation began after the Ministry of Construction and Minister of Electricity 2 Khin Maung Myint informed the pagoda’s board of trustees of the changes that would have to be made. Since then, the Shwe Taung Development Co Ltd has donated most of the funding for the renovation work, according to sources close to the board of trustees.

In return, the company has been awarded a number of lucrative contracts to run gas stations and build roads, bridges, buildings and toll gates, according to businessman close to the company.

“Some communities, such as Tin Tate village and Swan Chat village, have been living around the pagoda for generations. They have taken care of it for centuries, and they are really mad about the regime’s ridiculous decision, but they can’t do anything about it,” said one Sagaing resident.

Others also lamented the changes, but noted that this was not the first time the regime has literally defaced an ancient monument.

“Some people think they are making merit by doing this, but to us, it’s just the opposite. It’s like when they whitewashed the walls of the Kyauk Taw Gyi Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill, where many artists and writers used to visit to observe the ancient wall paintings,” said one writer from Amarapura, one of Burma’s ancient capitals.

Another example of state-sponsored vandalism, he said, was the loss of the wall paintings on the corridor walls of Maha Myat Muni Pagoda due to inept restoration efforts.

An architect from Mandalay said that ancient sculptures and other artwork on the four gateways of the Mandalay Kuthotaw Pagoda, once popular with photographers, were similarly disfigured when the regime ordered them covered with red and gold paint.

“Each gateway measures about 20 feet by 30 feet, so you can imagine how much of our national heritage was lost,” he said.

“But what’s happening at Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda, which is much larger, is incomparably worse,” he said.

Burmese architect and designer Aung Myint said that while the golden color of Rangoon’s famous Shwedagon Pagoda looks graceful against the blue background of the sky and the dark green of the surrounding hills, the whiteness of the Yaza Mani Sula Kaung Hmu Daw Pagoda has its own elegance set against Sagaing Hill.

“The ancient wooden architecture of Naung-U and Shwezigon Pagoda were also pleasing to the eye,

but now their charm is gone because they have been painted gold,” he added.

Bu Pagoda, on the bank of the Irrawaddy River in Pagan, has met a similar fate, and no longer looks like the ancient work of architecture it is because it, too, has been covered with gold paint to satisfy the tastes of the ruling generals.

To add insult to injury, say purists, the generals insist on inscribing their names on every ancient pagoda they have taken the liberty of retouching to demonstrate their misguided sense of patronage.

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### **The Irrawaddy – Burmese MPs Question, Get Stonewalled by Ministers**

**By HTET AUNG** Friday, March 11, 2011

Burma’s bicameral parliament has been meeting since January 31, but Thursday marked the first time that legislators were allowed to question and discuss proposals submitted by fellow MPs, leading some observers to be skeptical about whether any immediate change in current government policies could be expected to come out of this session of parliament.

According to The New Light of Myanmar, a state-run newspaper, in the Thursday sessions of both the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), MPs were allowed to question incumbent junta ministers and discuss proposals submitted in advance by fellow parliamentarians on a range of state affairs.

Among the issues raised by the members of parliament are the role of central government in the relief and rehabilitation efforts required by natural disasters, the issues of land ownership and land confiscation, a free health-care scheme for poor citizens, educational reform and environmental concerns related to a jade mine in Kachin State.

The junta ministers, who are also members of parliament, responded to all of the questions and proposals with long explanations that included a large amount of statistical data, but in the end they either rejected the proposal, demanded it be withdrawn, or gave a vague promise to address the issue when the time was appropriate.

Observers pointed out that the ministers are backed by ministry bureaucrats with full resources and so are able to generate as much data as necessary to support their position, while normal MPs could conduct only minimal research due to the lack of time, material, money and technical resources.

“After the election, we didn’t know how much the emerging parliament would exercise democratic principles—the situation was like groping in the dark,” said Khin Maung Swe, the leader of the National Democratic Force (NDF), which won 16 seats in the national and regional parliaments. “So what we can do in this first parliamentary session is to raise some urgent issues, but we have to follow up on these issues with research at a later time.”

A member of parliament told The Irrawaddy that the junta’s newspaper censored details regarding questions the MPs asked the ministers.

“Some members of parliament discussed issues in detail, but the newspapers didn’t describe their comments,” said a Pyithu Hluttaw representative on condition of anonymity. “For example, there were detailed discussions on the issue of inadequate rice assistance to the Cyclone Giri victims, partly because of the corruption of the local authorities.”

In addition, there is speculation in parliament that a motion for the release of political prisoners and a general amnesty for exiles has been dropped from discussions.

But asked about the possibility of discussing the issue in parliament, Khin Maung Swe said: “As far as we know, it is still on the table and we hope to discuss it soon.”

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### **The Irrawaddy – Burmese React to Japan Earthquake**

**By KO HTWE** Friday, March 11, 2011

Family members of Burmese working and living in Japan said they are worried for their relatives after hearing the news of an 8.9 magnitude earthquake that hit a Pacific fault line off the northeast coast of Japan.

Tokyo and much of the country has been severely affected, and a tsunami with waves as high as 10 meters has destroyed coastal buildings, vehicles and bridges. Other Pacific Rim countries were put on high alert.

Early reports said that at least 40 people had been killed, but that figure was expected to rise exponentially.

The quake coincides with a trip to Japan of popular Burmese celebrities Nay Toe, Han Tun, Chaw Su Khin, Yadanar My and others.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Friday, a family member of one of the performers said she is worried about her sister and is unable to reach her by phone or Internet.

"I'm so worried," she said.

An estimated 20,000 Burmese are currently working and living in Tokyo.

"The gas is cut off. Water has been cut some places in Tokyo. Our important documents are in our backpacks," wrote a Burmese under the pseudonym of "in Breathing Linn" on his Facebook account.

"I'm now outside on the street," said Kyaw Nyunt in Tokyo. "I cannot live in my apartment because it is on the fourth floor and bricks and tiles are falling off it. Mobile phones are not connecting and the TV is off."

Myat Thein, who has lived for nearly 20 years in Japan, said that many residents have headed to parks because they are afraid to be near high-rise buildings. He said that all public transportation in Tokyo had been halted.

"I cannot contact my friends in Japan nor my family in Burma," he said. "The phone lines have been cut."

The Japanese government has announced a State of Emergency.

Japan lies in what is known as the "Pacific Ring of Fire" where large numbers of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions take place. About 90 percent of the world's earthquakes occur in this area.

Friday's quake surpasses the previous worst earthquakes in Japanese history—an 8.3-magnitude tremor in Kanto in 1923 that killed 143,000 people, and a 7.2-magnitude quake in Kobe that killed 6,434 people in 1995.

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### **Without costly remedies, Inle Lake could dry up again**

Friday, 11 March 2011 22:01 Tun Tun

New Delhi (**Mizzima**) – Burma's Inle Lake in Shan State might dry up again for a second year because of little progress on conservation preservation, according to a conservation group and a local political party.

Inle Lake in Yawnghwe in Shan State is the second largest lake in Burma and a premier tourist attraction and pilgrimage site.

Two groups, the Forest Resource Environment and Development Association (FREDA), and Inn, a local political party, issued the warning.

FREDA chairman U Ohn told Mizzima that little effective preventive conservation work has been done and there has been a lack of promised foreign aid. 'This is a cash crunch problem', he said.

Inn National Development Party (INDP) Shan State Lower House MP Win Myint told Mizzima: 'We are in the same situation we had before', he said. 'The water in the lake is only one and half feet deep at Yawnghwe and Phaungdaw Seik. You can see the lake bed while you are traveling on the lake. Motorboats have difficulty in mooring at Phaungdawoo pier'.

The average depth of the lake is about 7 feet. The maximum depth is about 12 feet in summer.

In 2008, the lake dried up and shrunk from 40 square miles to about 23 square miles.

U Ohn said that he was disappointed by the failure to address the problem.

'The scholars and academics have submitted their papers on this work' he said. 'But the funding for this work must be provided by either government or foreign donors. We have only limited financial resource of 6.6 million kyat (US\$ 75,000).

'We can do only minor work. The foreign donors are just giving lip service but not actually giving money to us. I am disappointed with the project', he said. A local domestic fund for Inle Lake was raised by

donations from local hotels, restaurants and private donors.

FREDA estimated about US\$ 50 million (45 billion kyat) is needed for the conservation project. The European Union EU earmarked 400 million euro for environmental conservation work in five Southeast Asian countries. About seven months ago, FREDA asked the EU for US\$ 60,000 for survey work but it has not yet received a reply.

U Ohn said the causes are well known. 'Hotels and restaurants in the area must do proper waste disposal management in their businesses', he said. 'They should not discard waste into the lake, and they should convert their waste into organic fertilizer. Also they must build proper toilets. The most important thing is a buffer zone in which we must grow trees and do reforestation work. In farming too, the farmers should use organic fertilizer instead of chemical ones. The chemicals used in growing tomatoes on floating islets do serious damage to the environment.

'The inlet source of Inle Lake is the catchment area around the lake and it carries silt. So the lake cannot hold water for a long time and it can easily dry up. We must control the inlet and outlet of water in the lake. The inlet water must be clean and free from silt. At the same time, the outlet water should not be more than the desired amount', he said.

FREDA is a nongovernmental organization in Burma that works for environment protection and conservation. Currently, it is working on reforestation of mangrove forests in the Cyclone Nargis-hit Irrawaddy delta region.

INDP MP Win Myint said the party has proposed a plan to plant trees up to 20 miles around the lake and the creation of a reservoir to supply clean water for the lake.

'We can do this work as a mass movement with volunteers', he said. He said it would be good to get foreign donations, but the effort can't depend on donations.

'This lake is the lifeline of our local people so we have to do this work even it takes 10 or 20 years to complete. We are determined to do this work', he said.

U Ohn said that he was frustrated to see weak coordination among the agriculture, forest, irrigation and fishery departments, but he was glad to see the formation of a government environment and economic research working group.

Currently, local authorities are engaged in dredging work in the lake and building embankments.

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**Denmark, Latvia support UN commission of inquiry**

Friday, 11 March 2011 19:02 Thomas Maung Shwe

Chiang Mai (**Mizzima**) – London-based Burma Campaign UK announced on Thursday that Denmark and Latvia have joined 10 other European Union nations in support of a UN commission of inquiry to probe possible war crimes in Burma.

The announcement by the Danish foreign ministry that it 'supports in principle the establishment of an international investigation into human rights abuses in Burma' and a similar statement from the Latvian government came after a group of more than 100 Burma activists in London marched to six separate European embassies on Thursday to publicly urge the governments of Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Denmark and Germany to come out in support of a commission of inquiry.

The marchers were led by Wai Hnin Pwint Thon, the daughter of a jailed Burmese political prisoner, Mya Aye. Mya Aye participated in Burma's 1988 student-led uprising and was jailed for eight years beginning in 1989 for anti-regime activities. In 2007, he was jailed and given a six decade-long prison sentence for participating in demonstrations with student leaders Min Ko Naing that formed the early part of the Saffron Revolution.

In a statement issued by the Burma Campaign UK, Wai Hnin hailed the Danish and Latvian government's decisions, saying 'I am very pleased that two more European countries are supporting a commission into crimes against humanity in Burma. The European Union must now officially support a UN commission of inquiry'.

Latvia and Denmark are now the 11th and 12th EU member states to endorse the proposed commission of inquiry.

The Burma Campaign UK's renewed push for more nations to support the establishment of a UN

commission came three days after UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana, released a report to the UN General Assembly in which he reiterated his call for the creation of a commission which he first proposed in a previous report delivered to the UN in March 2010.

Quintana stated in his latest report that due to the 'systematic nature of human rights violations in' Burma it is 'essential for investigations of human rights violations to be conducted in an independent, impartial and credible manner, without delay'.

Germany Embassy calls police on Burma marchers

The Burma Campaign UK also reported on Thursday that in sharp contrast to other European embassies that warmly greeted the marchers and accepted the Burma Campaign letters addressed to the respective European foreign ministers, the German Embassy did not take kindly to the presence of Burma activists picketing its premises.

According to Burma Campaign UK Executive Director Mark Farmaner, when the marchers arrived at the embassy, German foreign ministry officials at first 'refused to allow the delegation of three into the Embassy' to deliver a letter urging Germany to support human rights in Burma.

After protest organizers pointed out that the other European embassies happily accepted the letters, the embassy eventually allowed the delegation to hand over the letter during an impromptu meeting in the embassy, but unlike what occurred at the other embassies this was done in the presence of security personnel.

The German Embassy then appeared to retaliate against the protesters by calling the police demanding that the group of more than 100 marchers move away from the embassy proper.

According to Mark Farmaner, the police relayed the demand issued by the German Embassy but then allowed the marchers to stand directly in front of the embassy as the protesters are permitted to do under local law.

Mizzima has requested that the German foreign ministry press office comment on their decision to ask for police intervention has so far not been answered.

In a response to a question asked earlier in the day about Germany's stance on the commission of inquiry, German foreign ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer told Mizzima that Chancellor Angela Merkel's government is 'closely following the debate on the establishment and the working modalities of a commission of inquiry.'

Last November, a fellow German government spokesperson told Mizzima that with regards to the calls for a commission of inquiry, 'to ensure that this new initiative [the inquiry] is successful and has positive consequences, it is important to continue to monitor the situation and crucial to find some co-operation mechanism with the [Burmese] national authorities'.

In a preface to his organization's most recent state of the world report, Human Rights Watch's executive director Kenneth Roth criticized the German government spokesperson's claim that a commission of inquiry needed the assistance of the Burmese regime to move forward.

According to Roth, 'Obtaining such cooperation from the Burmese military in the absence of further pressure is a pipe dream'.

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### **Merit and music for Cyclone Giri victims**

**Friday, 11 March 2011 12:38 Mizzima News**

Rangoon (**Mizzima**) – Burmese film stars and more than 40 singers will take part in a fund raising concert on March 19 for Cyclone Giri victims.

All the proceeds of the concert, which will be held in a football stadium in Rangoon, will go to aid people who are still struggling to recover from the cyclone which struck western Burma on October 22, 2010.

Academy Award winning actress Swe Zin Htike said that she was proud to see social networks being set up in Burma, which can work to meet the needs of the people. It's important for artists and entertainers to become involved in such work, she said.

'Artists around the world are doing a lot of social work for needy people, children, mothers and patients', she said. 'I have encouraged fellow artists to take part in social work for a long time. I'm glad

we get this chance to work for Cyclone Giri victims'.

One of the organizers of the concert, Soe Nyi Nyi, the owner of the Feel restaurant chain, encouraged young people who want to take part in social work activities to contact him.

Another concert organizer, Nyi Toe Min, an ethnic Rakine, said, "I wanted to hold a concert for victims just after the cyclone hit, but I couldn't do it. Then I realized from news reports that the cyclone victims still needed help'.

Among the concert performers will be the Young Bots band.

Cyclone Giri left at least 45 people dead and 70,975 people homeless. It devastated about 15,000 homes, according to a report by the United Nations Office for Coordination in Humanitarian Affairs.

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## **DVB News – Rangoon workers stage mass strike**

**By AYE NAI**

**Published: 11 March 2011**

More than 1,500 workers at a factory in Rangoon have braved the heavy-handed reputation of Burmese authorities to go on strike, demanding an increase to their meagre salary.

The men and women of Taiyi shoe factory, who are now four days into their strike, have cried foul of the unfeasibly low wages which see them earn just \$US0.70 for a 12-hour day.

Factory owners yesterday agreed to raise the hourly pay by a fractional 15 kyat (\$US0.01), but the strike continues.

"The workers said they wouldn't start working until they get 75 kyat [\$US0.08] per hour," said a source close to the workers. "The factory sounds the siren [for workers to begin their day] at 7am but instead of going into the factory, the workers are sitting outside continuing the strike."

Four police vehicles are reportedly stationed at the top of Kanaung Minthargyi Street which leads to the factory in Hlaing Tharyar industrial zone. Civilian vehicles have been blocked from entering the compound.

Strikes by some 700 workers at two garment factories in Rangoon, the United World factory and Oscar factory, last month met with success after employers agreed to their demands for better working conditions.

And just over a year ago a series of workers' strikes rocked factories in Rangoon, and led to calls for stronger labour union laws in Burma. That may soon be realised, given a recent announcement that a new Trade Union Act has been drafted.

Unions have been legally allowed in Burma, although a clause in the 2008 constitution states that their formation is conditioned on not being "contrary to the laws enacted for [Burma's] security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquillity, or public order and morality". The subsequent definitions for these criteria are vague.

More than 30 labour activists, including eight female members of the Federation of Trade Unions Burma (FTUB), are imprisoned in Burma out of a total of more than 2,150 political prisoners. Perceived dissent in Burma is often punished by lengthy jail terms.

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\* The views expressed by authors in the articles are their own, but not necessarily reflect the policy standpoint of BURMA DIGEST editorial team.

\* Readers can also state their views *in English* in the comment box below; currently No Comments.

\* This article is archived under [Burma News](#) category.

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