

# Than Shwe Meets New Thai PM

Saturday 15 March 2008, by [Wai Moe](#) (Date first published: 14 March 2008).

The head of Burma's military junta, Snr-Gen Than Shwe met the visiting prime minister of Thailand, Samak Sundaravej, during a "goodwill" visit on Friday in the new capital, Naypyidaw, reports say.

The Thai premier is also scheduled to meet with his counterpart, Gen Thein Sein, on Friday afternoon. The two prime ministers were expected to talk over bilateral trade issues to consolidate economic ties.

Samak is also due to fly to Rangoon the same day before returning to Thailand. The new Thai prime minister's visit is part of an official Southeast Asian trip; last week he visited Laos and Cambodia, and he plans to visit Vietnam in the near future.

Thailand is one of largest investors in Burma in recent years after investing US \$6.311 billion in the Burmese electrical power sector in 2007. In total, Thai investment in military-ruled Burma currently stands at \$ 7.3 billion, some 53 percent of Burma's total foreign investment, according to official data.

During an election campaign in late 2007, Samak, the leader of the People's Power Party (PPP), said that if his party won the election, he would attempt to hold six-party talks to resolve Burma's crisis.

The Burmese junta's mouthpiece, The New Light of Myanmar, reported on March 11 that at the invitation of Burma's prime minister, Samak would pay a "goodwill" visit to Burma.

A Thai historian at a university in Bangkok, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the Burmese trip was a clear indication that Samak wished to continue the cooperative policy that former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had pursued previously. "Thailand's foreign policy might not be so different from that of the Thaksin period," she said.

Pokpong Lawansiri, the Southeast Asian program manager of human rights organization Forum Asia, told The Irrawaddy on Friday that the Thai foreign minister's recent comments that Burma's human rights' record was an internal issue had caused concern for human rights defenders in Thailand.

"The Thai ambassador in Geneva recently said the new government's foreign policy would focus on democracy and human rights. But this has never been [confirmed] by the [new] Thai government," he added.

UN Special Envoy to Burma Ibrahim Gambari recently visited Burma from March 6 to 10. Although he asked for a meeting with Than Shwe, his request was denied.

---

**P.S.**

\* From The Irrawaddy:

[http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=10849](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=10849)