

News Summary on Burma

Archives of 15 to 31 July 2007

31 July 2007 :

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 2. **Myanmar reports new bird flu outbreak**
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Australia Urges China, India to Pressure Burma to End Abuses

Associated Press - 31 July 2007

Australia called on China and India on Tuesday to pressure Burma to end rights abuses and democratize faster, saying efforts by Southeast Asia and the West have failed to move Rangoon's "insensitive" leaders.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Western sanctions and threats as well as Asean's approach of "constructive engagement" have failed to convince Burma's military junta to end years of rights abuses and make significant process along a "roadmap" to democracy.

"I hate to say this, but it seems to me that nothing has worked," Downer told reporters on the sidelines of the Manila meetings.

Burma's "leadership seems completely insensitive to and impervious to the views of the outside world," he said.

Downer said he hoped that China and India, which have important economic ties with Burma, would make its ruling junta realize that current conditions there jeopardize the small Southeast Asian nation's future.

Downer said he displayed his exasperation when he met his Burma counterpart, Nyan Win, in a meeting in Manila.

Downer told him that in more than a decade of meetings with Burma's top diplomats, he has repeatedly asked when the junta would undertake democratic reforms or release pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

"I said to the foreign minister, 'I suppose, this time next year, if I'm back again, you'll just give me the same answer—constitutional reform still under way,'" he said. "It's been under way for more than a decade."

Asked what the best approach toward Burma was, Downer said governments have no choice but to persistently demand change.

Myanmar reports new bird flu outbreak

Agence France Presse - 29 July 2007

YANGON - Myanmar has detected a fresh outbreak of bird flu on two poultry farms south of the capital Yangon, state media said on Sunday.

Authorities confirmed on Tuesday that dead chickens at the farms in Mon state, about 300 kilometers (180 miles) south of Yangon, had been infected with the H5N1 virus, the official Mirror newspaper said.

Animal health officials killed about 300 chickens on the two farms, the paper said, quoting Myanmar's livestock breeding and veterinary department.

30 July 2007:

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1. Asean Agrees on Human Rights Commission
 2. Myanmar to finish National Convention in 2 months
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Asean Agrees on Human Rights Commission

Associated Press - 30 July, 2007

Southeast Asian foreign ministers agreed Monday to set up a regional human rights commission, overcoming fierce resistance from military-ruled Burma.

A charter being drafted for the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations will include a provision mandating creation of the human rights body, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said.

"We have agreed that there will be a human rights body," Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo said after the ministers met for four hours to discuss the draft. "There was a consensus."

Yeo said details will be settled later but that the foreign ministers hoped to have everything worked out by the time that Asean leaders hold their annual summit in November, when they plan to approve the charter.

"I'm very optimistic," Yeo said.

Asked about Burma's resistance and reaction to the agreement, he said: "I think Myanmar [Burma] takes a positive attitude toward all these developments."

Details of the agreement among Asean foreign ministers were not immediately available.

The Philippines had pressed strongly for an Asean rights body, with Romulo saying it would give the bloc "more credibility in the international community."

"I would say most of the Asean countries were in favor of this from the very beginning. We had to agree on this, we had to get a consensus. Now we have the consensus," he said.

The debate over the charter reflects how Asean's diverse membership, including fledgling democracies, communist countries and a military dictatorship, has hobbled decision-making.

Myanmar to finish National Convention in 2 months

Kyodo News - 30 July 2007

Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win told his ASEAN counterparts Sunday

that Myanmar will finish the National Convention to set guidelines for a constitution, part of the country's road map to democracy, in two months.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo told a new conference that Nyan Win said in a statement during an informal dinner session of ASEAN foreign ministers "that they are on the road to democracy and that on July 18 they started the convention and hope to finish discussions within two months."

Nyan Win also said that after the convention Myanmar "will move on to the drafting of the constitution, and then eventually a referendum," Romulo said.

"The convention they say will end two months from now, and then they will start drafting the constitution," said Romulo, chair of this year's meeting of foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Romulo also said he reiterated the Philippines' call for Myanmar to speed up the return of democracy in the country, especially the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from the prolonged house arrest.

"Several of us expressed our desire, our dream, our hope that Suu Kyi will be released," he said. "We want to see more acceleration in the process. We want to see that the road map to democracy which encompasses all the stakeholders in Myanmar is part of it."

"I sensed some impatience in the members. We insisted that it's time to release Suu Kyi, and that in the spirit of reconciliation all the stakeholders be made part of the process. This was repeated by several speakers and so I sensed that there is impatience, there is frustration up to now," he said.

27 July 2007:

1. U.S. official nixes early resumption of direct talks with Myanmar
 2. Philippines Calls Burma to Free Suu Kyi on Asean Anniversary
 3. Myanmar opposes human rights body in Southeast Asia
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U.S. official nixes early resumption of direct talks with Myanmar Kyodo News - 27 July 2007

A senior U.S. government official voiced reluctance Thursday to restart direct talks with Myanmar's military junta until Yangon is ready to discuss the Southeast Asian nation's full democratization.

Eric John, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, took the stance one month after he pressed Yangon officials in rare talks in Beijing for the release of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"If we have another meeting, both of us want it to be productive. So I think we prefer to meet when there is some productive work to do," he told Kyodo News after a symposium on Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

The State Department explained after the Beijing talks that they took place at Myanmar's request. The Chinese capital was chosen because Myanmar refused to allow John to meet Suu Kyi, who has spent 11 years under house arrest since she returned to the country in 1988.

The department also said at the time that the talks yielded nothing that indicates Yangon's willingness to move toward democratization in the

near future.

Philippines Calls Burma to Free Suu Kyi on Asean Anniversary
Associated Press - 26 July, 2007

The Philippines appealed Thursday for Burma to release pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi by November, when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations marks its founding anniversary.

"That's a very important milestone," Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said.

Romulo said he would convey his appeal to his Burmese counterpart, Nyan Win, who is to join an annual meeting of Asean foreign ministers Monday.

Burma's spotty human rights record has been raised at every major Asean meeting, but Romulo said there was no other option but to be patient.

"It's not easy to be waiting all the time, but we must keep our hopes and optimism," he told a news conference. "We should never get weary."

Myanmar opposes human rights body in Southeast Asia

Associated Press - 27 July 2007

MANILA, Philippines: Myanmar has objected to a proposal to create a regional human rights body under a landmark charter being drafted by Southeast Asian countries, delaying its completion, diplomats said Friday.

The proposal, backed by more liberal countries such as the Philippines, is among the few remaining contentious issues holding up completion of a charter for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the diplomats said.

The Southeast Asian diplomats, who were helping draft the charter, spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

ASEAN, formed in 1967, has decided to draft a charter to become a more rules-based organization with better bargaining power in international negotiations. It hopes the charter can be signed at an annual ASEAN leaders' summit in November.

A high-level ASEAN task force has completed about 95 percent of the work and plans to submit a final draft to the region's foreign ministers at a meeting in Manila on Monday.

Claro Cristobal, an ASEAN conference spokesman, said diplomats from the task force labored from late Thursday into the early hours of Friday but failed to resolve differences on the human rights issue.

"They have not reached that happy convergence," Cristobal told a news conference.

He refused to call it a deadlock, saying he expected a compromise formula

to be reached soon.

Enshrining human rights protection in the charter has been a touchy issue because some ASEAN countries have spotty rights records, such as military-ruled Myanmar.

Diplomats have agreed to guarantee the protection of human rights in the current draft charter, but Myanmar rejected a proposal to specifically mention creation of a rights commission, the two diplomats said.

A draft of the charter, seen by The Associated Press on Wednesday, calls for the "respect of fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights and the promotion of social justice" but made no mention of a human rights body.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said Thursday his government wanted the creation of such a body guaranteed by the charter to give ASEAN "more credibility in the international community."

Aside from the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia have raised the need for such a rights body in the past but other ASEAN members have opposed it.

Some ASEAN members fear such a commission could allow scrutiny of rights conditions in one country, possibly violating the group's cardinal policy of noninterference in each other's affairs.

26 July 2007:

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1. Beaten human rights defender jailed by Myanmar court, say activists
 2. Horrified MPs demand huge aid increase
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Beaten human rights defender jailed by Myanmar court, say activists Associated Press - 25 July 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - A human rights defender who was severely beaten by a pro-Myanmar government mob has been sentenced to eight years in jail for inciting unrest, activists said Wednesday.

Myint Naing and another member of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Network, Maung Maung Lay, were attacked and seriously injured on April 18 at Oakpon village in Henzada township, 100 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of the commercial capital Yangon.

About 50 assailants attacked them with clubs and other homemade weapons as they provided human rights training to villagers according to Human Rights Watch.

The assault was organized and carried out by members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association _ a government-backed organization with a reputation for intimidating and attacking opponents of Myanmar's junta, the rights group said.

USDA was established by the junta in 1993, ostensibly as a social welfare organization.

Horried MPs demand huge aid increase

The Independent, UK - 26 July 2007

By Ben Russell, Political Correspondent

The cross-party group of MPs described their visit to the border regions of the brutal military state as "harrowing", warned of the "incomprehensible" plight of millions of people and condemned the "scandal" of aid expenditure that is the lowest for any of the world's poorest countries.

Burma is a forgotten "nightmare" of dire poverty, disease, rape and forced labour that makes the plight of its people one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, according to their report. They called on Britain to quadruple aid to Burma and pour resources into agencies working across the country's borders to help huge numbers of people forced from their homes and subject to a catalogue of human rights abuses.

Senior opposition MPs joined the clamour for action on Burma as members of the all-party Commons international development committee delivered a devastating verdict on the situation in Burma.

The committee said that military rule in the former British colony whose people were crucial allies in the campaign against the Japanese at the end of the Second World War, had "systematically torn apart" the country's industrial and social fabric. They said hundreds of thousands of people were suffering from "a political, human rights and humanitarian situation as grim as any in the world today".

They praised Britain for increasing aid to Burma four-fold in the past six years, but said levels remained "unacceptably low".

Malcolm Bruce, the committee's Liberal Democrat chairman, said: "Burma receives the lowest aid per head in the world for a poor country. Given the pernicious human rights abuses and dire poverty levels within Burma, this is a scandal." He said that officials from the Department for International Development did not regularly visit refugee camps on the Thai border.

William Hague, the shadow Foreign Secretary, said: "Our Government, with cross-party support, should lead the way in supporting democracy-building, human rights documentation, education, and in providing humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable the refugees and the internally displaced people of Burma."

Sir Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrat leader, also called on ministers to back aid with increasing pressure on the regime to end human rights abuses.

As many as 500,000 people have been displaced in eastern Burma, while hundreds of thousands more live in refugee camps.

A spokesman for DfID said: "The UK is committed to helping vulnerable people in Burma and the aid we provide has gone up from £2m in 2002 to over £8m a year, with a view to further increases in the near future. We remain one of the big three donors to the country. None of our aid is given to the military regime.

"We work with many NGOs and the UN to help provide basic services for the poor, to tackle Aids, tuberculosis, malaria and to help get more children into primary schools."

25 July 2007:

1. After Libyan nurses' deal, Paris sets sights on Suu Kyi release
 2. Asean charter will put pressure on Myanmar to improve rights record
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After Libyan nurses' deal, Paris sets sights on Suu Kyi release

24 July 2007, 15:48 CET

PARIS - Following the release of six Bulgarian medics from a Libyan jail, France's junior minister for human rights said Tuesday she hoped to win freedom for Myanmar's jailed democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi, a 62-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner, has spent most of the last 17 years under house arrest in a country that has been under military rule since 1962.

The democracy leader "would deserve that France give more attention to her situation, which is something I fully intend to do," the French minister, Rama Yade, said in a statement.

Stressing the role played by President Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife Cecilia -- who took part in negotiations in Tripoli on the six medics' release -- Rade said that "even if one battle has been won, the fight against human rights violations must, more than ever, be pursued."

"France, as the cradle of human rights, has a duty more than any other country to defend fundamental rights," said Yade, who declared herself "happy to see that, in this field, France is back."

Asean charter will put pressure on Myanmar to improve rights record

Agence France Presse - 24 July 2007

Asean will unveil a charter next week that will, for the first time, set specific standards on the 10-nation bloc, putting pressure on members such as Myanmar to improve their rights record or face stern measures, the group's secretary-general said yesterday.

"The charter will help Asean's relationship with Myanmar," secretary-general Ong Keng Yong told reporters in Singapore, adding that it would "stress responsibility and obligation of the membership," compared to current discussions on compliance which are "more persuasive, more informal".

Ong said the first draft of the landmark charter for the Association of South East Asian Nations, whose 10 members also include Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, would be ready when Asean foreign ministers meet in the Philippines next week.

An Asean charter is seen as a milestone for the bloc because it would create a rules-based community for a group that has been derided as a talk-shop.

Until now it has operated without a constitution, choosing to rely on informal diplomacy and decision-making by consensus. But many leaders believe a charter is necessary to help the group speed up economic integration. Ong said the charter's compliance measures would have the

same effect as sanctions and would stress the obligation to meet certain standards.

But he said the charter would not spell out how to punish those members in breach of the rules, even though some members have suggested expulsion from the group in the most extreme case.

But some critics say that the charter is being watered down to appease Myanmar's generals.

24 July 2007:

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1. Top UN Envoy on Myanmar Kicks Off Trip to Russia, Europe
 2. House votes to renew Myanmar sanctions
 3. UNFPA to expand HIV prevention project in Myanmar
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Top UN Envoy on Myanmar Kicks Off Trip to Russia, Europe
UN News Centre, New York - Jul 23 2007

Arriving in Moscow today, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, began a weeklong trip that will also take him to several European capitals.

In Russia, Mr. Gambari is scheduled to hold consultations with senior Government officials, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York.

He will then stop in Paris, Brussels and London for additional meetings with Government and European Union counterparts.

Mr. Gambari will also visit Geneva to confer with other UN officials before returning to New York next weekend, and all of his consultations are taking place within the context of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate for Myanmar.

Earlier this month, he visited China, Asian and Japan for talks with officials.

House votes to renew Myanmar sanctions

Associated Press - 23 July 2007

WASHINGTON — Congress moved Monday to extend import sanctions on Myanmar for another year, citing the Asian country's suppression of political dissent and human rights.

The House voted by voice to renew the ban on imports, imposed under a 2003 law, for another year. The Senate Finance Committee approved an identical resolution later in the day.

"The controlling junta continues to have total disregard for its own people and their basic rights," Rep. Sander Levin, D-Mich., said of the military government that has held power in Myanmar, also known as Burma, since 1988.

He said the military leaders continue to arrest and torture political

activists and refuse to release Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader who has been detained by the government for 12 of the past 18 years.

The United States also restricts exports and financial transactions with Myanmar, and imposes an arms embargo with what House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Tom Lantos, D-Calif., called "one of the most repressive regimes on the planet."

Lantos acknowledged that unilateral sanctions were of limited effect when other countries - he mentioned China and India - had active commercial relations with Myanmar. But he said European nations are imposing sanctions and he hoped the U.S. stance would "influence those in the international community who are currently asleep at the wheel of justice and human rights."

UNFPA to expand HIV prevention project in Myanmar

Xinhua News - July 23, 2007

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will expand its HIV prevention project in Myanmar with the help of Three-Disease (3-D) Fund to cover two dozen more areas in the country, a local weekly reported Monday.

The UNFPA is at present using its regular fund to carry out the prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission project in 24 townships in the country and the coverage will be extended up to a total of 50 townships across Myanmar by 2010 with the 3-D fund additionally, the Myanmar Times quoted sources with the organization as saying.

According to the organization, the UNFPA is offering voluntary counseling and confidential blood testing for pregnant women who seek antenatal care and providing care and treatment for opportunistic infections in HIV-infected pregnant women.

There are three stages at which HIV can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding, health experts said.

Meanwhile, The 3-D fund is considering to provide a new aid of 20 million US dollars to Myanmar to support work in fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria, diplomatic sources said earlier, however, adding that the aid is subject to Myanmar's assurance to provide a supportive operating environment for the fund and the work be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

The 3-D Fund will help stop the spread of the diseases by supporting work through national and international non- governmental organizations, the UN System and local public health teams, it said, adding that the fund will focus on priority areas identified in the three national strategies for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria.

A recent workshop involving Myanmar, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS stated that 338,911 people were estimated to have lived with HIV/AIDS in 2004 and the HIV prevalence in Myanmar has reduced from 1.5 percent in 2000 to 1.3 percent in 2005.

HIV/AIDS is among the three major communicable diseases of national concern designated by Myanmar. The other two diseases are tuberculosis and malaria.

20 July 2007:

1. Final charter meeting begins in Myanmar
 2. Myanmar's increasing external ties and final steps to a new constitution
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Final charter meeting begins in Myanmar

Associated Press - 18 July 2007

NYAUNG-HNA-PIN, Myanmar - Myanmar's military government opened Wednesday what it says will be the final session of a national convention aimed at completing a process launched 14 years ago to draw up guidelines for a new constitution.

In his opening speech, Lt. Gen. Thein Sein, the acting prime minister, called the convention the most important part of the road map, and urged delegates not to try to amend points previously agreed to.

"Since this is the last session, delegates are asked to review the principles ... without deviating from the already agreed guidelines," he said.

Thein Sein, also the chairman of the National Convention Convening Commission, said most of the population supports the convention, but that a small "negative-looking group" opposes it.

He warned that legal action will be taken against anyone who tries to derail the process.

The convention, meeting after a seven-month hiatus, could take about a month and a half to complete, Information Minister Brig. Gen. Kyaw Hsan said.

The final session is to adopt guidelines for the remaining seven of the constitution's 15 chapters, and make some changes to previously approved parts.

"The government did not make it clear what changes will be made, but we view this as a positive move," Han Tha Myint, an NLD spokesman, told The Associated Press on Tuesday, referring to the planned completion of the first stage of the roadmap.

Han Tha said the party has asked the government to amend some of the constitution's 104 basic principles and six objectives, one of which guarantees a major role for the military in Myanmar's political future.

Ethnic minority groups have complained the adopted principles would give the central government greater powers, even though their delegates have demanded equal rights and greater administrative and judicial

powers. Many minorities have been seeking greater autonomy for decades.

In all, 17 armed ethnic minority rebel groups have reached cease-fire agreements with the junta since 1989. Some surrendered their arms, but a few kept their weapons to take care of their area's security.

Most of the groups had asked the government to allow them to keep their armed units as a police or guard force, but the point has not yet been addressed in the charter guidelines.

"We have to wait and see the outcome of the National Convention. We have requested the government to make appropriate arrangements for our soldiers, but the role of our armed group is not yet clear under the new constitution," said Naing Tin Hla, a member of the New Mon State Party who is attending the convention as an observer.

Myanmar's increasing external ties and final steps to a new constitution

SEAPSNET News – 20 July 2007

Myanmar's junta has invited 25 local Burmese media groups (including The Myanmar Times, Yangon Times, the Eleven Media Group and Snapshot Journal) as well as 20 Rangoon-based foreign journalists to cover the final session of the constitution-drafting National Convention.

The convention sees the participation of 1,000 hand-picked delegates at a secluded military compound with resort facilities including a cinema and golf course.

It is the first of the generals' seven steps on the "road map to democracy" and also a chance for the junta to consolidate their power in Myanmar. The talks are expected to last about six weeks. The seven remaining chapters to be finalized are on "Election", "Political Parties", "State of Emergency", "Amendments of Constitution", "State Flag, State Emblem, National Anthem and Capital", "Transitory Provisions" and "General Provisions".

This is a bid to publicize the constitutional process and counter criticisms from Myanmar's main opposition parties, including the National League for Democracy, who argue that the proceedings of National Convention have not been democratic. Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been under house arrest for 17 years, had boycotted the convention.

"The authorities are holding the National Convention as a one-sided process. It cannot solve our problems," said Chin Sian Thang, head of the ethnic Zomi National Congress. However, Colonel Tu Jar, deputy-chairman of the China-Burma border based cease-fire group Kachin Independent Army (KIA) felt otherwise. "We understand that the National Convention chairman will be reviewing all chapters since 1993. We also have to raise some issues for ethnic affairs, especially in ethnic-army controlled areas which they refused during the last session," he said.

The Myanmar military junta is not only putting up a "public relations" effort to highlight its roadmap to democracy but has also been active with its external relations. Far from being isolated diplomatically as the US and European Union (EU) would have liked it to be, Myanmar is courted by its big neighbours, including India, China and Pakistan. Unlike the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Indian understanding is based on

hard realities — the present ruling junta is there to stay, and it is best to deal with them directly. Coordination between Indian and Myanmar security forces in counter-insurgency operations has grown dramatically in recent years especially after Myanmar's ruler General Than Shwe's visit to Delhi in 2004.

General Than Shwe has reportedly asked for helicopters, helicopter gunships, heavy rockets, navigation equipment and global positioning system devices from the Indian government which India is willing to supply. In August 2006, ignoring British protests, the Indian Navy transferred two British-made BN-2 'Defender' Islander maritime surveillance aircraft and deck-based air-defense guns and varied surveillance equipment to Myanmar. India went on with the transaction despite British declaration that it would be unable to provide spare parts and maintenance support for them as it opposed the Myanmar's military junta.

Ironically, EU who always been in the forefront of criticisms against Myanmar, might find itself indirectly transferring military technology to Myanmar. A Bernama news report quoting a report by NGOs revealed that six EU states may be indirectly transferring helicopter component technologies to Myanmar via India. The report, entitled "Indian helicopters for Myanmar: making a mockery of the EU arms embargo?", was prepared by European and international NGOs, including Amnesty International and Saferworld, who said that the Indian government was planning to transfer the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) made operational with vital components from EU member states to Myanmar.

"Should this transfer go ahead, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Britain could be undermining an EU arms embargo on Myanmar in place since 1988," the NGOs said.

Other than India and China (Myanmar's closest ally), Pakistan also has longstanding military ties with Myanmar, to whom it had supplied several shiploads of ordnance and other military hardware like 106 mm M-40 recoilless rifles and various small arms over the past decade. Pakistan also regularly trains Myanmar soldiers to operate a range of Chinese military equipment like T-63 and T-53 tanks, Soviet fighter aircraft and 155-mm howitzers.

Economic ties with India and China are also expanding. Widening road work continues at the Ledo Road that will link India and China through Burma. Tracts of lands have also been opened up for bidding by the country's own emerging industrialists who have access to the junta or foreign powers that require lots of Myanmar's natural resources. Business isn't just restricted to natural resources. India is also making feasibility study on building a deep-sea port in Myanmar's southern Tanintharyi division. More importantly, India is working with the Myanmar government in the field of technological transfers.

Multilaterally, Myanmar may be ignoring ASEAN and focusing its efforts in another sub-regional grouping, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which comprises Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal. Myanmar is now gearing up to take over the chairmanship of the BIMSTEC from India in 2008 under the rotation system. Myanmar's Dawei deep-sea port project stands as one of the priorities among future programs for the grouping. With a population of over 1.3 billion, which accounts for 21 percent of the world's total, BIMSTEC registered a gross domestic product of 750 billion U.S. dollars and trade volume of 33 to 59 billion dollars.

19 July 2007:

1. Ban Ki-moon encourages inclusive national reconciliation process in Myanmar
 2. HRW asks global community to pressure Myanmar rulers
 3. IAEA says yet to see concrete plan of Myanmar's nuclear ambition
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Ban Ki-moon encourages inclusive national reconciliation process in Myanmar

UN News Centre - 18 July 2007

As Myanmar resumed its National Convention today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for the Government to foster an inclusive process.

Through his spokesperson, Mr. Ban encouraged the Government "to seize this opportunity to ensure that this and subsequent steps in Myanmar's political roadmap are as inclusive, participatory and transparent as possible."

This should be carried out with "a view to allowing all the relevant parties to Myanmar's national reconciliation process to fully contribute to defining their country's future," spokesperson Michele Montas said in a statement.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Adviser on Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, held a round of consultations on the issue in key Asian capitals earlier this month.

HRW asks global community to pressure Myanmar rulers

Press Trust of India – 19 July 2007

New York - A US-based human rights watchdog has criticised India, China and Russia for "failing" to take note of the "repressive system of military rule" in Myanmar.

In a statement, the Human Rights Watch criticised international community for, what it called, looking the "other way as Burma's (Myanmar) government tries to hide its repressive rule behind the facade of constitutional rule."

It said Myanmar's Nations Convention, which has resumed session to write a new constitution, would create a "more refined but still repressive system of military rule."

The UN and key members of the international community should make it clear to the military rulers that they will not recognize the outcome unless this constitutional convention adequately and freely reflects the views of all segments of the society, it added.

IAEA says yet to see concrete plan of Myanmar's nuclear ambition

Kyodo News - 18 July, 2007

The International Atomic Energy Agency has yet to see any concrete plan by military-ruled Myanmar to build a nuclear reactor although the country

has signed a deal with Russia to set up a research reactor, the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said Wednesday.

"I haven't seen any plan by Myanmar to build a reactor...At this stage there is more news stories than fact," IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur during a two-day visit to Malaysia.

Russia's atomic energy agency Rosatom signed an agreement with Myanmar in May to build the nuclear facility in one of the world's poorest nations and a country on which the West has imposed sanctions since late 1988 over its poor human rights record.

The Russian agency said that the facility would be under the control of the Vienna-based IAEA.

Myanmar reportedly said that the reactor would be used to train Myanmar scientists and to produce radio isotopes which can be used in medicine and agricultural science.

"It is up to each country to decide if they need a research reactor...The important thing is, if a country was to develop a research reactor, it will have to be under full agency verification," ElBaradei said.

17 July 2007:

1. Indians defiant on arms to Burma
 2. Belgian arms for Myanmar?
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Indians defiant on arms to Burma

The Australian - 17 July 2007

Indian arms sales to Burma's military junta -- including the provision of attack helicopters -- will continue, despite fierce condemnation from the human rights group Amnesty International, officials in New Delhi indicated yesterday.

A European Union arms embargo on Burma was under threat from an Indian project to sell an attack helicopter to the military regime, Amnesty said in a report yesterday.

Defending the arms sales, a senior official in the Indian capital said: "Amnesty can say what it likes, but what we are dealing with is the reality -- the realpolitik -- of massively increasing Chinese influence in Myanmar, which is in our own backyard. If we do not do something to dilute that growing Chinese influence with the junta, we will be cutting off our noses to spite out faces."

He added: "As well, there is the reality of the insurgency in our northeast -- in Assam and places like that. Much of it is based in Myanmar. We want the junta to stamp out those operational bases. But we have to give them the means to do that."

Belgian arms for Myanmar?

Expatica Belguim - Belgium
16 July 2007

BRUSSELS – Amnesty International and other non-governmental organisations suspect India of supplying helicopters to Myanmar, despite the ban on sales of weapons to the country. La Libre Belgique and Le Soir report that a company in Liege helped build the helicopters.

The company denies any part in violating the weapons embargo.

The Liege-based company Forges de Zeebruges won a contract with an Indian company to provide weapons equipment for helicopters. The company then applied for a permit for this from the Walloon government, the head of the company reports.

The regional government issued the permit on condition that the country ordering the weapons would not be allowed to sell them on to a third country.

Le Soir reports that India and China are competing to secure market share on the arms market in Myanmar

16 July 2007:

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1. India-Myanmar helicopter sale threatens EU ban: NGOs
 2. Myanmar to resume charter talks
 3. Despite Chinese ban, Myanmar timber still crosses border
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India-Myanmar helicopter sale threatens EU ban: NGOs
Agence France Presse - 16 July 2007

A European Union arms embargo to Myanmar is under threat from an Indian project to sell an attack helicopter to the military regime, Amnesty International said in a report published Monday.

The London-based rights group said France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Italy and Britain provide components and technology for the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), potentially flouting the 19-year-old ban on arms sales.

Its report, "Indian helicopters for Myanmar: making a mockery of the EU arms embargo?" was compiled by European and international non-governmental organisations, including Saferworld, which works to prevent armed violence.

The document said the Indian-manufactured helicopter would not be operational without vital components from EU member states and highlights the urgent need for stricter arms controls.

It said variants of the ALH contain rocket launchers from Belgium; rockets, guns and engines from France; brake systems from Italy; fuel tanks and gearboxes from Britain and self-protection equipment from a Swedish company.

German companies, meanwhile, are said to have been "crucial" to the development of the aircraft's design, while also manufacturing controls for the ALH's engine.

"The EU embargo explicitly states that no military equipment should be supplied, either directly or indirectly, for use in Myanmar," said Saferworld's team leader on transfer controls and small arms, Roy Isbister.

"What's the point in having an arms embargo if it is not going to be implemented or enforced?"

The United Nations has described human rights violations in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, as "widespread and systematic", including summary executions, torture and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Amnesty's arms control researcher Helen Hughes said: "Greater attention has to be given to the end-use agreements and the re-export of components from EU member states.

"Otherwise, these states could find themselves indirectly propping up a brutal regime which they themselves have condemned and whose violations have amounted to crimes against humanity."

US companies are also identified in the report for making military equipment for the ALH, despite a similar arms embargo.

The report calls on Brussels to begin immediate talks with India with a view to preventing any future sales of the ALH, components or technology to Myanmar.

Amnesty called for all future production co-operation with India that could lead to banned items ending up in Myanmar to be discontinued, and any future arms deals with India to prohibit the transfer of the technology to Myanmar.

Myanmar to resume charter talks

Agence France Presse - 15 July 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's military rulers on Wednesday are set to open what they say will be the last round of talks on a new constitution, which analysts criticise as a tool to tighten the junta's grip on power.

The military's hand-picked delegates at the National Convention have been meeting on and off since 1993 to draft the guidelines of a new charter, purportedly the first step on the generals' "road map" to democracy.

But the junta has laid out no timeline for eventual elections, and analysts say the charter itself will serve only to formalise the military's role in government.

"This is all completely meaningless without the NLD," said Walter Lohman, a senior research fellow for Southeast Asia at the Heritage Foundation in Washington.

An Asian diplomat in Yangon said the convention had "no credibility" for the international community, which has repeatedly demanded the junta free the 62-year-old Nobel peace laureate.

"It is a consensus in the international community that the National Convention lacks legitimacy because of the absence of Aung San Suu Kyi,"

said the diplomat, who declined to be named.

The convention draws more than 1,000 hand-picked delegates at a secluded military compound outside Yangon, where they stay with resort-like comforts including a cinema and golf course.

During the final session, expected to last about a month, delegates are rarely allowed to leave the compound and have no contact with the outside world.

The junta says it will hold a referendum on the new charter following the convention, and then call for free elections. But the regime has never laid out a timetable for such steps.

The Asian diplomat said Myanmar was unlikely to speed up efforts on the charter referendum or elections.

"The convention has been held for more than 10 years, and given the regime's record, I really doubt Myanmar will hold elections anytime soon," he said.

Despite Chinese ban, Myanmar timber still crosses border

Agence France Presse - 15 July 2007

YANGON - Environmentalists in Myanmar have expressed their shock at seeing mountains of logs being transported on trucks across the border into China despite efforts to halt the trade to save the country's forests from total destruction.

"I was shocked to see mountains of logs and big timber trucks" heading from Laiza into China, the spokeswoman for one local environment group, the Pan Kachin Development Society (PKDS), said.

On condition that she not be named, she told AFP she had counted up to 80 trucks crossing the border each day during a visit to the town in April. Stacks of teak, tamalan and other woods lined the roads waiting to go, she said.

"It seems they have set up sawmills in the forest and chopped the trees to be easier to carry," she said. "Some logs were only about one and a half feet (0.45 metres) in circumference," although China usually wants trees nearly twice that size.

"That means that people even cut small trees because there are no more big trees left," she said.

The trade endures despite China's efforts to stop it because of a complex mix of interests.

For Myanmar's junta, timber is one of its major sources of desperately needed foreign currency.

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Japanese officials and UN envoy meet to discuss Myanmar
UN News Centre, New York - 13 July 2007

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Adviser on Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, today wrapped up his current round of consultations in key Asian capitals with a visit to Tokyo for talks with senior Japanese officials.

Mr. Gambari met with Japanese Vice-Foreign Minister Masayoshi Hamasa and Deputy Vice-Foreign Minister Chikao Kawai, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters in New York.

She said the Special Adviser and the Japanese officials held "detailed and open discussions" on how best the UN and Japan can work together to support Myanmar's efforts to implement relevant General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Asian country.

Kofi Annan urges Asean to exert "pressure" on Burma
Deutsche Presse-Agentur - 13 July 2007

Nobel laureate and former UN secretary general Kofi Annan on Friday urged Southeast Asian governments to exert more pressure on Burma's military government to speed up democratic reforms.

Annan also suggested that a non-interference policy among member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) ought to be revised, warning that domestic problems within a country often affected neighbouring countries in the same region.

"Asean does have a policy of non-interference," Annan said during a two-day visit to Malaysia, another country in the bloc.

"But Asean member states also belong to the UN [and therefore] accept the responsibility to protect their citizens from gross violations of human rights and protect them from crimes against humanity," he said.

"There are certain crimes that we cannot say: it is somebody else's responsibility, they should resolve it. We should all feel compelled to act," he said.

"Asean can use peer pressure to steer things right in Myanmar," Annan told a media conference in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

Annan said ASEAN "should be able to do more" to urge Myanmar's ruling junta to speed up action on its promises of democratic reform.

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