

### **Myanmar forces raid monasteries overnight**

The Associated Press - September 26, 2007

YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar security forces raided at least two Buddhist monasteries and arrested a prominent dissident after opening fire on pro-democracy protesters led by monks in Yangon, sources said Thursday.

Overnight, they arrested Myint Thein, the spokesman for opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, family members said. Unconfirmed reports said other members of the National League for Democracy were also arrested.

At least two monasteries, hotbeds of the pro-democracy movement, were raided by security personnel during the night but details were not immediately available, two sources close to the scene said on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals from the government.

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### **Russia warns against pressure on Myanmar**

Reuters - 26 September 2007

MOSCOW - Russia, a veto-holding permanent member of the U.N Security Council, warned on Tuesday against exerting pressure on the Myanmar military government over its actions to quell the strongest anti-junta protests in 20 years.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement it was closely watching protest marches by Buddhist monks and the Myanmar opposition in Yangon and several other cities.

"We consider any attempts to use the latest developments to exercise outside pressure or interference in the domestic affairs of this sovereign state to be counterproductive," the statement said.

It called on both the government and the opposition to "exercise restraint", but added: "We still believe that the processes under way in Myanmar do not threaten international and regional peace and security."

Russia's reaction to the Myanmar protests contrasted strongly to that of Western nations, which strongly condemned the military junta.

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### **India breaks silence, wants "broad-based" reforms in Myanmar**

IANS - 26 September 2007

New Delhi, As the military junta stepped up its crackdown on the largest pro-democracy protests in Myanmar in nearly two decades, India Wednesday broke its silence and called for "broad-based and inclusive political reform" in that country.

New Delhi also hoped that "all sides will resolve their issues peacefully through dialogue".

"The government of India is concerned at and is closely monitoring the situation in Myanmar. It is our hope that all sides will resolve their issues peacefully through dialogue," external affairs ministry spokesperson Navtej Sarna said in response to a question on the crisis in Myanmar.

"India has always believed that Myanmar's process of political reform and national reconciliation should be more inclusive and broad-based," he said.

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### **Italy to seek urgent EU meeting on Myanmar**

Reuters - Wednesday, September 26 02:29 pm

ROME - Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi will ask the European Union to hold an urgent meeting on Myanmar to seek ways to "halt the violence" as the junta cracks down on protests against decades of military rule.

Prodi said in a statement on Wednesday that he would talk later in the day to the prime minister of Portugal, which currently holds the EU presidency, to propose such a meeting.

"The international community must mobilise to uphold respect for human rights everywhere in the world and to ensure liberty to express people's own opinions and dissent in a peaceful way," said Prodi, a former president of the EU's executive Commission.

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**Ban Ki-moon dispatches Myanmar envoy to region as situation worsens**

UN News Center - 26 September 2007

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced today he is sending his Special Envoy dealing with Myanmar to the region in response to the deteriorating situation in the Asian nation, and once again urged authorities there to respond to the ongoing peaceful protests with the utmost restraint.

Noting reports of the use of force and of arrests and beatings, Mr. Ban called again on authorities "to exercise utmost restraint toward the peaceful demonstrations taking place, as such action can only undermine the prospects for peace, prosperity and stability in Myanmar," in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

The Secretary-General – who held a tête-à-tête with Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win later today – called on the country's senior leadership to cooperate fully with the mission of his Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari "in order to take advantage of the willingness of the United Nations to assist in the process of national reconciliation through dialogue."

While Myanmar's Government has not yet accepted Mr. Gambari's mission, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters in New York that "he will stay in the region, and as soon as he gets the green light he will proceed."

After Mr. Gambari briefed the Security Council this afternoon on the latest developments, Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert of France – which holds the rotating Council presidency this month – issued a press statement voicing members' strong support for Mr. Gambari's visit and underlining the need for the envoy to be received by authorities as soon as possible.

Mr. Ripert said Council members expressed concern at the situation and urged restraint, especially from the authorities.

Also expressing concern about the well-being of the demonstrators, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour today urged the authorities to allow the peaceful expression of dissent in the country and to abide by international human rights law in their response.

"The use of excessive force and all forms of arbitrary detention of peaceful protesters are strictly prohibited under international law," she said.

Ms. Arbour also expressed her continuing concern for those who have been detained during recent weeks, and for the welfare of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

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**ASEAN foreign ministers set to discuss Myanmar turmoil**

Agence France-Presse - 09/27/2007

UNITED NATIONS -- Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are to meet Thursday to discuss the bloody turmoil in member state Myanmar ahead of separate talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Although Myanmar is not on the official agenda of the internal ASEAN meeting, as it was scheduled much earlier, officials said the crisis had to be tackled following the international furor created by the military junta's bloody crackdown on massive protests on Wednesday.

"I think it is important that ASEAN, whilst not wanting to interfere, must be able to assess the situation and make its decision accordingly -- one way or another," Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told AFP.

"We cannot be seen to be just ignoring what is happening in Myanmar when so much concern has been voiced by the international community," he said. "So, we need to address the issue."

A senior ASEAN official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Myanmar crisis has given a "black eye" to the grouping.

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#### **Myanmar military shot at protesters: French diplomat**

AFP - 26 September 2007

PARIS - The Myanmar military opened fire on crowds of protesters in Yangon, almost certainly causing casualties, a French diplomat in the city said Wednesday.

"Shots were fired by the security forces, first in the air, then at the demonstrators. We cannot know if many people were injured but we can be sure that blood was spilled," Emmanuel Mouriez, number two at the French embassy, told French radio RTL.

"We have several witness accounts describing people lying on the ground," he added.

Soldiers and police in junta-ruled Myanmar fired tear gas on about 1,000 protesters led by Buddhist monks early Wednesday as they started a march from a landmark Yangon pagoda, witnesses said.

Despite the crackdown, tens of thousands of protesters regrouped in downtown Yangon an hour later, according to witnesses.

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#### **Four killed in Myanmar protest crackdown**

AFP - 26 September 2007

YANGON - At least four people including three Buddhist monks were killed Wednesday as Myanmar security forces used weapons and tear gas to crush protests that have erupted nationwide against the military junta.

Two of the monks were beaten to death while another was shot when he tried to wrestle a gun away from a soldier and the weapon discharged, two senior Myanmar officials told AFP.

They said the monks were killed near Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar's holiest site and a key rallying point for the clergy leading the protests now posing the biggest challenge to the junta in 20 years.

A fourth man, who was not a monk, was pronounced dead on arrival at Yangon General Hospital with gunshot wounds, a hospital source said.

The UN Security Council was to meet in an emergency session in New York at 1900 GMT Wednesday to discuss the spiralling crisis, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, whose country is the former colonial power, said "the whole world is now watching Burma" and called for a UN envoy to be sent there to talk to the "illegitimate and repressive regime."

The White House said reports of the deadly violence were "troubling," and urged the military junta to respect human rights.

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### **Myanmar cracks down on protesters but marches continue**

AFP - 26 September 2007

YANGON - Myanmar security forces fired tear gas and warning shots and beat protesters with batons Wednesday, hoping to crush the mass rallies that have erupted nationwide against the military regime.

But tens of thousands of people still took to the streets, marching and shouting abuse at police despite orders from the ruling generals.

Just hours after police beat students and Buddhist monks at Myanmar's holiest shrine, the Shwedagon Pagoda in the main city of Yangon, another crowd regrouped and marched through the main market.

Nearby thousands of joyous onlookers cheered as around 1,000 monks paraded through the streets, refusing to back down despite fears that the junta would shoot large numbers of people to put the unrest down.

The crowd roared approval for the monks and shouted at security forces: "You are fools! You are fools!"

Police and troops then fired a volley of warning shots and tear gas to try to break up the march.

Witnesses said at least 17 monks were injured in the beatings, which the party of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi called "the greatest wrong in history." Witnesses saw one monk with a gunshot wound to the head.

"Anything can happen now," a Western diplomat in Yangon said earlier. He said the kind of limited crackdown on the protests "would be a kind of last warning before the worst."

It was not immediately known if authorities were cracking down elsewhere but the protests have become nationwide. State media said there have been rallies in seven of the country's 14 provinces.

Around 15,000 people marched Wednesday in the western city of Sittwe, a local resident said.

In Yangon, a separate march headed toward the house of Aung San Suu Kyi where she has been held under house arrest for 12 of the last 18 years.

As they walked, they urged the crowd of onlookers to remain calm.

"We monks will do this," they called out. "Please don't join us. Don't do anything violent."

Troops were deployed outside the headquarters of Aung San Suu Kyi's party. Pro-democracy politician Win Naing and the country's most famous comedian Zaganar were arrested for helping the protests.

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**Myanmar bans gatherings, imposes curfew**

Associated Press – 25 September 2007

YANGON, Myanmar - The military government banned assemblies of more than five people and imposed curfews in Myanmar's two largest cities on Tuesday, after thousands of Buddhist monks and sympathizers defied orders to stay out of politics and protested once again.

The 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew and the meeting ban were announced late Tuesday through loudspeakers mounted on vehicles cruising through the streets of Yangon and Mandalay, said witnesses. The announcement said the measures would be in effect for 60 days.

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Myanmar riot police, troops deployed in Yangon

Reuters – 25 September 2007

YANGON - Eight truckloads of armed riot police moved into central Yangon on Tuesday after a second day of mass protests against Myanmar's military junta ended without incident, a Reuters witness said.

The police, carrying shields, batons and rifles, deployed in the Botataung part of the city, near the end-point of the biggest anti-junta marches in nearly 20 years, the reporter said.

Another witness said five military trucks packed with soldiers drove into the downtown area, suggesting the junta was filling up the city centre to counter any attempt at a repeat of the mass marches led by Buddhist monks.

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U.N. rights envoy fears severe repression in Myanmar

Reuters - 25 September 2007

GENEVA - The United Nations human rights investigator for Myanmar said on Tuesday he feared a "very severe repression" by the military junta and called on major powers to mediate in the southeast Asian country.

Myanmar is witnessing the biggest anti-government protests in 20 years and the junta poured troops and police armed with rifles into central Yangon on Tuesday.

"A very severe repression is very close to happening," Paulo Sergio Pinheiro told Reuters in a telephone interview. "It would be very important to try to mediate and try to convince the government that it can't proceed down this path."

He singled out China as a regional power which would play a "positive role" to defuse the crisis and called for "quiet diplomacy" by countries including the United States.

"It is an emergency," he said.

"My perception after following the mindset of the military for the last seven years is I don't think they can continue to tolerate protests," he said.

Pinheiro expressed disappointment that the U.N. Human Rights Council had failed so far to take up the situation in Myanmar during its three-week session which ends on Friday.

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China believes Myanmar gov't could properly handle current situation

Xinhua - 25 September 2007

BEIJING -- China hopes and believes Myanmar government and people could properly handle the current situation, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Jiang Yu on Tuesday.

"China always sticks to the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries," Jiang said at a regular press conference.

"As a neighboring country of Myanmar, we hope to see that its society is stable and its economy develops," she said. "We hope and believe that Myanmar's government and people can appropriately deal with their current problems."

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EU warns Myanmar of new sanctions if protest crushed

Reuters - Sep 26, 2007

UNITED NATIONS - The European Union warned Myanmar's military junta on Tuesday it would face tougher EU sanctions if it uses force to crush growing pro-democracy protests.

The EU statement came after the authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew and poured security forces into the streets of Yangon to try to end the most serious demonstrations in almost 20 years, led by Buddhist monks.

In a statement issued by its Portuguese presidency, the 27-nation bloc said: "The EU further underlines to the authorities ... that it will reinforce and strengthen the existing sanctions regime, should they resort to using violence against the unarmed and peaceful demonstrators."

The EU statement urged the Myanmar's authorities to pursue genuine reconciliation and negotiation, and urged "all those with influence on the military government to bring that influence to bear to ensure that the authorities respond in a non-violent manner."

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### **Singapore "concerned" over Myanmar protests**

Agence France Presse - 24 September 2007

Singapore on Monday said it was "concerned" over the protests in Myanmar and hoped the situation would be resolved peacefully.

"Singapore is concerned over the latest developments in Myanmar and is monitoring the situation closely," the ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement.

"We hope that the ongoing protests will be resolved in a peaceful manner."

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### **Myanmar protests should spur national dialogue, Ban Ki-moon says**

UN News Centre – 24 September 2007

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today he hoped the recent wave of peaceful protests in Myanmar will spur dialogue between the Government and all relevant parties on promoting national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and full respect for human rights in the Asian nation.

"The Secretary-General hopes that the Government will seize this opportunity to engage without delay in dialogue with all the relevant parties to the national reconciliation process on the issues of concern to the people of Myanmar," his spokesperson said in a statement.

Mr. Ban also expressed his commitment to “continue to intensify his assistance in this process with a view to promoting national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and full respect for human rights in Myanmar.”

The Secretary-General is closely following events in the country, where demonstrations began last month in protest at a surge in fuel prices and the protesters have included many of the country’s monks.

“He commends the peaceful approach the demonstrators are using to press their interests, and he calls upon the Myanmar authorities to continue to exercise restraint,” the statement added.

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### **Myanmar authorities should show restraint - EU spokeswoman**

Agence France-Presse – 24 September 2007

BRUSSELS - The military junta in Myanmar should show restraint in its treatment of protests and seize the chance to launch a real reform process, the EU foreign policy chief’s spokeswoman said today.

'We are following the events in Myanmar very closely,' Christina Gallach, spokeswoman for Javier Solana, told Agence France-Presse.

'It is important that the authorities exercise restraint in the face of the demonstrations,' she added.

'We hope that the regime will seize this opportunity to launch a process of real political reforms,' said Gallach, recalling that the EU as ever calls for the release of political prisoners.

'Peace, stability and development can only be gained through political reforms, the respect of freedoms and fundamental rights and the inclusion of everyone,' she added.

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### **Bush to levy sanctions against Myanmar**

Associated Press – 24 September 2007

NEW YORK - President Bush on Tuesday will announce additional sanctions against the military dictatorship in Myanmar to support the push for democracy in that Asian country, the White House said Monday.

Bush, in a speech at the U.N. General Assembly, will announce financial sanctions against key members of the regime and those who provide them financial aid, said Stephen Hadley, the president's national security adviser.

"It's very interesting what is happening in the country with the Buddhist monks who have joined this effort," Hadley said. "Our hope is to marry that internal pressure with the external pressure coming from the United States and the United Nations and really all countries that are committed to freedom to try to force the regime into a change."

Hadley would not be specific about the financial sanctions to maintain what he called an element of surprise against those who might try to hide their assets. But he said they would target key members of the regime and those who provide financial support to them.

He also said there would be a visa ban against those associated with the regime, including their families.

"He will call for the United Nations and for other countries there to do all they can to support a process of political change in Burma," Hadley said.

The U.S. restricts imports and exports and financial transactions with Myanmar. Washington also has imposed an arms embargo on Myanmar.

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**Regional perspective: UN Security Council: The real battle on Burma**

24 September 2007, The Nation

One would have thought that in the Beltway's scheme of things, Middle East politics is the only dominant global issue. However, a few days in Washington DC demonstrated that a sudden shift of attention could happen at any time. Washington-based diplomats usually agree that US officials in the capitol have a short attention span. But it will be different this time round because the world's most powerful couple, President George W Bush and Laura Bush, have their eyes fixed on Burma as well.

Reports and hundreds of photos of the peaceful protests by Buddhist monks in the past week were seen and discussed by the powerful couple at the White House. Bush has renewed his call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Apparently, the president is willing to do more bilaterally and internationally to bring pressure to bear on Burma. His wife has already become a tireless and gracious campaigner in the effort to promote women's rights in Burma, as well as Afghanistan.

Last week, Ibrahim Gambari, the UN special envoy for Burma, called for a unified global approach during his briefing to the 15-member UN Security Council (UNSC). He said the latest events were a clear setback for Burma. He also expressed concern for those in detention, especially those on a hunger strike and said he hoped that the junta would heed worldwide calls for their release, as well as that of all political prisoners. He urged the international community to persevere.

For outsiders watching the drama unfolding in Burma, there are many questions. How long must the country wait for the international community? Does the resolution of the political turmoil there depend on the amount of blood spilled on the streets? Has the UN learned a lesson from its handling of the Darfur crisis?

Among diplomats in Washington, two schools of thought prevail concerning Burma's present crisis. The first group supports a more biting resolution at the UN to further isolate the country, while the second group prefers an incremental approach that everybody - including China and Russia, Burma's biggest supporters on the UNSC - would eventually accept.

Despite their differences, both groups agree that the UNSC's hands-on and sustainable engagement of the Burmese junta is pivotal to breaking the current impasse there. It remains to be seen whether there is enough time to persevere, as Gambari suggested. After all, it has been nearly two decades since the regime in Rangoon took over and began systemically oppressing the Burmese people.

Obviously, many are anxious to see whether the monks' protest will spread throughout the country and be sustainable. Violence and carnage could result if street tensions continue. If that were to happen, a blame game would begin. Diplomats over here talked about how the international community must stand, ready to extend a helping hand. Unfortunately, Burma today is surrounded by other troubled countries with problems of their own.

Thailand is still under the spell of the coup. As a frontline state for Asean, Bangkok has all but lost its moral authority to have a positive influence on the current political developments in Burma. Bangladesh is no different from Thailand. The whole country has been focused on

political conflicts and mammoth domestic problems. Only China and India can make a difference.

The US-led effort to further isolate and punish Burma through a UNSC-sponsored resolution has made little headway. When it was last introduced, the resolution was vetoed. A similar resolution this time would draw the wrath of China and Russia. It would instead be preferable for the US to engage these two council members and keep the debate on Burma alive on the agenda.

Quite a few Western diplomats advocate this strategy, arguing that any way out for Burma would require China's cooperation. It is better to have council members discussing the Burma situation regularly with some benchmarks to pursue. Over time, these diplomats hope, additional pressure would be placed on Burma's backers in the absence of progress in the country.

Beijing has showed its diplomatic shrewdness by encouraging Burma to accelerate its democratic roadmap. Trying to emulate the success of efforts to put pressure on China over the Darfur crisis by linking it to next year's Olympics in Beijing, Western campaigners on Burma are now highlighting China-Burma relations, which could hit Beijing's international standing.

Interestingly, the current Burma debate also dwells on the growing concern of the aloofness of the world's largest democracy. Obviously, New Delhi's influence is no match to that of China but its seeming indifference over the trauma on its eastern flank has had the immediate effect of diverting pressure away from China, at least for the time being. It is also possible US-India ties could be affected if Bush decides to take the matter up with India and is met with the same attitude.

Asean has been unusually quiet on the ongoing protests in Burma, as it is trying to wrap up drafting of the Asean charter. Asean foreign ministers will put their stamp on the charter this week in New York before it is forwarded to their leaders. The Burmese situation is high on the agenda of the scheduled meeting on Thursday between US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Asean foreign ministers.

The international community has the option to act now with the UN. Events since 1988 have shown beyond any doubt that the Burmese people want change. A failure to bring about greater democracy will certainly encourage the Rangoon regime to continue to oppress their people because so far their leaders have got away scot-free.

Kavi Chongkittavorn

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### **20,000 march in Myanmar against junta**

Associated Press – 23 September 2007

YANGON, Myanmar — About 20,000 protesters led by Buddhist monks and nuns on Sunday, shouting support for the jailed pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

At one point a small crowd of about 400 — about half of them monks — split off from the main demonstration and tried unsuccessfully to approach the house where Suu Kyi is detained. The monks carried a large yellow banner that read: "Love and kindness must win over everything."

On Saturday, more than 500 monks and sympathizers had been allowed past barricades to walk to the house, where she greeted them from her gate in her first public appearance in more than four years. The meeting symbolically linked the current protests to Nobel laureate's Suu Kyi's struggle for democracy.

The crowd of about 400 people peacefully abandoned their attempt Sunday to get to Suu Kyi's gate after being turned back at two different approaches blocked by barbed wire barricades.

The heavy security presence, including two lines of police — the rear line armed — and a police truck and fire engine, raised tensions after several days of a hands-off approach by authorities.

Some monks shouted support for Suu Kyi, while a crowd of about 10,000 sympathizers marched along, some holding hands to form a human chain to protect the maroon-robed clerics.

While authorities did not intervene in Sunday's march, plainclothes police trailed the marchers. Some, armed with shotguns, were posted at street corners along the route.

A monk gave a speech Sunday calling for Suu Kyi's release and national reconciliation, the witnesses said, again positioning their cause with her long-running struggle for democracy.

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### **Rome: Demonstration supporting Burmese monks fighting for democracy**

AGI - 23 September 2007

A demonstration supporting the Buddhist monks that have been demonstrating for days against the military regime in Myanmar, will take place tomorrow at 18,30 in Campidoglio (Rome Town Hall) in the presence of the Italian Buddhist community.

Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni has announced the initiative, saying: "We want to express our solidarity to the Burmese people and the monks that are currently fighting for democracy in their country and freedom for Aung San Suu Kyi".

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### **ASEAN leader appeals for restraint amid Myanmar's growing anti-government protests**

Associated Press - 23 September 2007

MANILA, Philippines - The Association of Southeast Asian Nations' chief urged Myanmar authorities Sunday to avoid any strong action against growing anti-government protests, in hopes of avoiding violence.

About 20,000 Buddhist monks and citizens were demonstrating against Myanmar's military junta in the country's largest city, Yangon, with many shouting support for detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, witnesses said.

I hope the relevant authorities in Myanmar will not take any strong action and turn the protests into a big confrontation, ASEAN Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong told The Associated Press by telephone from Poland.

The 10-country ASEAN, which includes Myanmar, was concerned over the protests and its foreign ministers would likely take up the issue when they meet on Sept. 27 in New York on the sidelines of an annual United Nations meeting, said Ong.

Things are becoming more serious. However, I don't know what ASEAN foreign ministers can do at this stage, he said.

I just hope the demonstrations remain peaceful, and I hope the authorities in Myanmar will find a way to handle the situation in a peaceful manner, he said.

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## **UN Envoy Says Concerned About Myanmar's Crackdown On Protests**

AP News - 20 September 2007

UNITED NATIONS --The U.N.'s envoy to Myanmar told the Security Council Thursday that recent protests in the country and the military regime's subsequent crackdowns raised "serious concerns" and underlined the urgency of resolving the political turmoil there.

In what U.K. Ambassador John Sawers called a "sobering briefing," the secretary-general's special envoy Ibrahim Gambari told the council he planned to make a trip to the country as soon as possible. He said he was still in discussions on the timing.

"Undoubtedly, the developments over the last few weeks in Myanmar have raised serious concerns in the international community and once again underscore the urgency to step up our efforts to find solutions to the challenges facing the country," Gambari told the council, according to a U.N. account of the closed session.

Gambari said he was very concerned about those in detention, particularly about those reportedly on hunger strike, and he expressed hope that the government will heed worldwide calls for their release - as well as the release of all political prisoners.

After Gambari's briefing, Sawers said many members of the council were "sympathetic" to the protesters and expressed outrage over their treatment and detention.

"We certainly are appalled by the steps the regime have taken to silence peaceful protest and to clamp down on dissent in the country," he said.

U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad added that Gambari should focus his attention on finding ways to improve the political environment in Myanmar, including working toward democratic reforms.

"One of the key elements of his mission to Burma is the political track, particularly within that track the release of political prisoners, the treatment of ethnic minorities, a process that can allow for political participation and determination by the people for their political future," said Khalilzad.

Khalilzad slammed the convention as a "sham."

"Not only the convention was not representative, but it has coincided with increased oppression," he said.

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### **Myanmar monks escalate pressure on junta**

AFP - 20 September 2007

YANGON - More than 1,300 Buddhist monks marched in Yangon on Thursday, their largest demonstration in Myanmar's main city against the junta since they launched a protest movement in force earlier this week.

Witnesses said several thousand onlookers watched the monks marching in the rain and praying in three separate rallies, in what a Western diplomat said marked an escalation of pressure on the military regime.

Thursday marked the fourth consecutive day of protests by monks in Myanmar and, for the first time, onlookers outnumbered the clergy.

"Today definitely marks an escalation" of the pressure, the Yangon-based diplomat said.

A Buddhist underground group claiming links to the protest movement vowed to continue demonstrations to end what it called the suffering of Myanmar's people.

"We will continue to protest until we get freedom and our human rights," said a purported spokesman for "The Alliance of All Burmese Buddhist Monks".

"Everything is bad here. Our economic system and political system are bad. We don't need them anymore," he told AFP in Bangkok by telephone from Myanmar.

"We can't suffer anymore."

More than 600 monks prayed at Sule Pagoda in central Yangon, watched by up to 2,000 people clapping and smiling, witnesses said.

Hundreds of people, most of them university students, braved the rain to briefly form a human chain at the pagoda.

"Protests will likely continue. Monks are representing people's pent-up frustrations with the regime," an Asian diplomat in Yangon told AFP.

Police did not intervene in the peaceful march, but dozens of plainclothes officers followed the monks with video cameras.

The government appeared to be handling the situation gingerly, aware that any action seen as mistreating the monks could ignite public outrage. They are aware that restraining monks poses a dilemma, because monks are highly respected in predominant Buddhist Myanmar, and abusing them in any manner could cause public outrage.

A member of one of the junta's neighborhood councils said it had been given instructions by authorities not to interfere with the protesting monks.

"We've been instructed to be patient and to even protect the monks," said the official, who asked not to be named because he is not authorized to release information. Other officials confirmed that they have been told to be tolerant and to exercise extreme restraint in dealing with present situation.

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### **Monks continue protests in Myanmar**

Associated Press - 19 September 2007

YANGON, Myanmar -- Hundreds of Buddhist monks protested Wednesday outside the locked gates of Myanmar's most revered temple, challenging the country's military rulers in the most sustained wave of demonstrations in a decade.

About 500 monks found the gates locked at the Shwedagon pagoda, a golden temple atop a hill dominating Yangon, the Southeast Asian country's biggest city.

They then marched through the streets, followed by a few hundred onlookers and scores of plainclothes security officials.

The Yangon march and rallies in other cities Wednesday were to protest hardship brought on by the government's economic policies, especially a sudden, major hike in fuel prices last month that first sparked the persistent demonstrations -- first by pro-democracy activists and now primarily by monks.

In the central city of Mandalay, more than 1,000 monks marched, while about 100 others in dark saffron robes staged a peaceful march in the western Yangon suburb of Ahlone.

More than 100 Buddhist monks from some monasteries in South Okkalapa township in Yangon's northern suburbs also marched early Wednesday, later returning to their monasteries without incident.

"The monks are telling the public not to take part in the protests. They told onlookers that this is the monks' affair and that they would handle it themselves," a witness contacted by phone in Ahlone told The Associated Press. The person asked not to be identified for fear of reprisals.

There were no reports of intervention by the junta, which acknowledged in state media reports Wednesday that authorities used tear gas and fired warning shots in the air to break up protests Tuesday in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state in western Myanmar.

The report said the authorities made no arrests and there were no injuries.

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### **Myanmar's military regimes tries to discredit marching monks**

DPA - 19 Sep 2007

Yangon - Myanmar's ruling military junta attempted Wednesday to discredit the hundreds of monks who resumed marching in protests similar to ones that helped trigger nationwide demonstrations 19 years ago. The monks, widely revered in this strongly Buddhist country, were described as "bogus," "violent" and "disrespectful" by government controlled newspapers, reflecting the danger they pose to a military that has ruled since a 1962 coup.

On Tuesday, shots were also fired in the north-western city of Sittwe. The state-run New Light of Myanmar admitted Wednesday that the authorities fired tear gas to disperse monks, but said that two sayadaws - abbots - from the official religious body the Sangha attempted to persuade monks in Sittwe from protesting, but their "reasonable" pleas were met with thrown sticks aimed at "patient" officials.

The state mouthpiece and other publications reported that although senior officials "gently persuaded" most of the protestors in Sittwe to disperse, a core group continued to demonstrate with sticks and stones and, later, attempted to get their colleagues released from custody. The actions "forced" officials to reluctantly fire into the air and throw tear gas grenades.

The newspapers pointedly claimed that no monk was injured in either incident.

Diplomats in Yangon said the determination of the protestors was unusual - reflected even in the official reports - perhaps signaling a growing and widespread dissatisfaction with the regime.

Wednesday's newspaper reports may be the nearest the monks get in their demand for an apology for the shots fired two weeks ago in the north, though it is unlikely to satisfy them, added diplomats.

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### **Tear gas used against Myanmar protest**

Reuters - 18 September 2007

YANGON - Authorities in military-ruled Myanmar fired tear gas on Tuesday to break up a protest of around 1,000 Buddhist monks and civilian demonstrators in the northwestern city of Sittwe, a witness said.

Three or four monks were arrested as the crowd scattered and were hit and slapped, the witness told Reuters.

The march, one of several in response to a call for a nationwide religious boycott of the former Burma's ruling military, started with 500 Buddhist monks but grew quickly as ordinary men and women -- some of them Muslims -- joined in.

There were no further details immediately available.

In Yangon, authorities closed the famed Shwedagon Pagoda, the Southeast Asian nation's holiest shrine, minutes before hundreds of monks arrived for the launch of a campaign to refuse to accept alms from anyone connected to the regime.

"We could not hold the formal ceremony to impose the religious boycott because we could not enter the Shwedagon compound," a 25-year-old monk told Reuters.

They then marched peacefully to the city centre, chanting prayers and holy scriptures but no political slogans.

Plainclothes police and members of the feared Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) shadowed their route. The USDA has played a prominent role in breaking up protests against soaring fuel prices that began four weeks ago.

They videotaped and photographed the monks, who were also watched by hundreds of people, some of whom paid obeisance to them, witnesses said.

One middle-aged monk said the boycott would go ahead.

"For me, I have imposed it on them since 1990 and I'll keep it on," he said.

Such a boycott is taken extremely seriously in the devoutly Buddhist country. Without such rites, a Buddhist loses all chance of attaining nirvana, or release from the cycle of rebirth.

Monks launched a similar boycott in 1990 shortly after the generals refused to honour the results of a general election they had lost by a landslide.

Earlier the monasteries were key players in a nationwide uprising against military rule in 1988 and analysts say the generals have been at pains to treat the monks carefully this time around.

A similar protest was held in Bago, 50 miles (80 km) north of Yangon, where exiled groups reported 1,000 monks marching to the town's pagoda.

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**China-Myanmar oil pipeline project approved - source**

(XFN-ASIA) - 18 September 2007

GUANGZHOU - The China-Myanmar oil pipeline project, which will transport oil imported from the Middle East, has won Chinese government approval, a source told XFN-Asia.

The Chinese side is drafting detailed plans for the construction of the pipeline, which will go to Chongqing in southwestern China, said the source, who declined to be identified.

In January, China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) signed production sharing contracts with Myanmar's Ministry of Energy covering crude oil and natural gas exploration projects in three deep-sea blocks off western Myanmar.

The China Oil News reported earlier this year that construction of the pipeline is expected to start this year.

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**Foreign Minister from Myanmar Begins Official Visit to Cuba**

Cuban News Agency - September 17, 2007

Havana - The Foreign Minister of Myanmar, U Nyan Win, begins on Monday an official visit to Cuba at the invitation of his Cuban counterpart Felipe Perez Roque.

This is U Nyan's second visit to the island as he also participated in the 14th Summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in Havana in September 2006 as the head of the Asian country's delegation.

During his three-day stay in Cuba, the visitor will participate in the 2nd Session of the Cuba-Myanmar Intergovernmental Commission and will hold official talks with Perez Roque.

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**Undersecretary Vernetti voices his regret over the failure of the National Convention in Burma**

Press Statement, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 07 September 2007

The Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Gianni Vernetti, has voiced his regret over what is, essentially, the failure of the National Convention in Burma, the aim of which was to open a true process of national reconciliation and democratisation in the country.

Undersecretary Vernetti also expressed his concern over the arrests of Burmese citizens during the peaceful demonstrations that began throughout the country on 15 August. He commented that the continuing detention of the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Aung San Suu Kyi, and other opposition leaders and political prisoners was a further cause for concern.

It is to be hoped that the Government of Burma will engage in an inclusive process of dialogue, national reconciliation and democratisation Italy continues its constant monitoring of the situation, in close coordination with its European Union partners. Our country is ready to support any international or multilateral initiative that might play a part in promoting a climate of dialogue in Burma.

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**Let us do everything possible to secure Aung San Suu Kyi's release**

Le Figaro - 14 September 2007

**Commentary by Rama Yade, state secretary responsible for foreign affairs and human rights.**

Since 15 August Burma has brought itself back to our attention. Each day sees demonstrators imprisoned for having peacefully protested the rise in fuel prices. The National Convention, which was supposed to relaunch the electoral process, produced nothing, as the opposition parties boycotted it. But there is nothing new here: this has been going on for 50 years now since the independence of Burma and the arrival in power of the military junta. Executions, arbitrary detention, and torture, this country, located at the heart of an Asia undergoing development, has an apocalyptic look to it.

The phenomenon of child soldiers (numbering 70,000) and political prisoners (more than 1,000), forced labour, and discrimination against and violence towards the ethnic minorities persist.

One might almost forget amidst this generalized repression that a 62-year-old woman, 15 of those years having been spent in detention, still stands tall, namely Aung San Suu Kyi. She won her victory in 1990, when her party, the National League for Democracy, took 80 per cent of the vote during the country's first and only free elections. Since then "Asia's Mandela" has been under house arrest. The aura of her father, the father of Burmese independence, the obtaining of a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, and her children's petitions to the junta, nothing has done any good. What is the international community doing? It is clearly necessary that someone should say that all it has attempted has failed. The United Nations? Its envoys have been coming back

empty-handed for 20 years now. She has adopted a consistent stance of having no further political relations with the ruling junta. Internationally renowned artists like Bono, U2, Sting, Peter Gabriel, and Paul McCartney have ceaselessly pleaded "for the Lady." In vain. Desmond Tutu and Vaclav Havel pitched their moral force into this struggle in 2006, pleading for a UN Security Council resolution in favour of democratic reforms in Burma. China and Russia opposed it.

And where is France in all this? Amidst this chorus of desolation I am convinced that it does have a role to play. All the democracies have already called for the release of the political prisoners. But words will not suffice. We must intensify our efforts to get Burma back into a process of democratization. That first requires close collaboration with the Asians. Because all that we do without them we would risk doing against them. It is important therefore that Asia take concrete measures to end the repression in Burma. Its own interest is at stake.

It is also important that France apply the international agenda as closely as possible. In a few weeks' time I will be chairing a working meeting on child soldiers at the United Nations in New York. The European Union will present a resolution there on the human rights situation in Burma. Our country will have to use its full weight to convince our European partners of the failure of our strategy and the urgent need to rethink it. This is a moral obligation.

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**Suu Kyi's party calls for dialogue with Myanmar junta**

AFP - 14 September 2007

YANGON — Myanmar's pro-democracy party on Friday called for dialogue with the ruling military junta after a string of rare protests led to a government crackdown and the arrest of dozens of its members.

The statement by the National League for Democracy, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, comes after the junta on Sunday threatened action against democracy activists and accused the party of inciting national unrest.

"The expectations of the people, who hope for a change here, will survive if we cooperate by quickly building national reconciliation after holding dialogue," the NLD said in a statement.

The party also denied it was the driving force behind recent protests, sparked by a surprise hike in fuel prices on August 15.

"These demonstrations occurred because the authorities were unable to reach a peaceful resolution, as proposed by the NLD," the group said.

Opposition party members have in the past urged the junta to enter into a dialogue with them to address social and economic hardships in Myanmar.

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### **Myanmar: dead last in freedom**

Asia News - 15 September 2007

Report by Worldwide Governance Indicators shows Myanmar at bottom of the list for freedom of expression, followed by China and Vietnam. Report studied 212 countries between 1996 and 2006.

Burma has been ranked 'zero,' the worst government in the world according to the amount of freedom citizens have to voice opinions and select a government. according to the latest Worldwide Governance Indicators

(WGI) report, produced by researchers from the World Bank Institute and the World Bank Development Economics Research Group.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) research project, covering 212 countries and territories, measured six areas of governance between 1996 and 2006 to make its rankings: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption.

Countries with the best overall rankings included Denmark, 100; Canada, 94; and Australia, 93. Countries with the worst overall rankings included Burma 0, China 4 and Vietnam 8.

In the Voice and Accountability category, Myanmar has ranked near 'zero' since 1996. Among Burma's neighbours: India ranked 58; Thailand, 32 and China, 4. Laos was ranked 6; Cambodia, 21; Malaysia, 38; Indonesia, 41; Philippines, 44; and Singapore 46.