

Qatar Airways to suspend flights to Myanmar

Reuters - 29 December 2007

Yangon • Qatar Airways, one of only 15 foreign airlines operating in and out of Myanmar, is suspending its four weekly flights to the military-ruled former Burma in January, a company official said yesterday.

"Our last flight on this route will be on January 9," a member of staff said, and added that the reasons for the route cancellation were "just commercial". However, one Yangon-based travel agent said the flights from Doha were nearly always full.

"We don't think the true reason for their suspending is commercial viability. Seat occupancy on their flights is very good," said the travel agent. "We think it could be due to the pressure from Western countries." Qatar Airways opened its Doha-Yangon-Doha route in December 2004.

Myanmar to get interest-free loan from Saudi

Xinhua - 24 December 2007

YANGON-- Myanmar may get long-term interest-free loan from the Saudi Arabian government which has set the country eligible for such loan under its National Assistance Fund being offered for developing countries, local media reported Monday.

The Saudi government's 25-year interest-free loans are particularly aimed at social development in such areas as schooling, healthcare and electricity generation as well as other development projects if necessary, the Saudi Embassy sources was quoted by the weekly Myanmar Times as saying.

Myanmar and Saudi have no official business links despite forging of diplomatic ties more than three years ago. However, Myanmar exports seafood, gems, wood and agricultural products to Saudi, while Saudi could potentially export to Myanmar goods such as pharmaceuticals, canned juice, urea and petroleum products, the sources said.

Saudi is in demand of rice and wheat which it does not produce, the sources added.

Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations with Myanmar in August 2004 and opened its embassy in Yangon in December 2005.

According to an earlier report of the local Weekly Eleven News, Myanmar is making arrangement to open soon an embassy in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East to start carrying out its diplomatic undertakings.

China pressure on Myanmar key, EU

Reuters -December 21, 2007

BEIJING - China's support has been vital in achieving initial steps towards national reconciliation in military-ruled Myanmar, an EU envoy said on Thursday.

"During my meetings with the Chinese authorities, they made clear that the way ahead regarding the Burmese crisis stands with the Burmese themselves," Piero Fassino, EU special envoy on Myanmar told a news conference.

"Of course I believe that it's our duty to encourage Burmese leaders to go along that direction, and in that regard the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the main political leaders are (would be) very positive steps," Fassino said at Thursday's news conference.

"But what the Chinese say is that it's up to them to take the final decision." On Friday a spokesman for Fassino said the envoy had not said the Chinese government would not directly push for the release of political prisoners or detained opposition leader Suu Kyi, as Reuters had earlier reported.

"The request for the liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi and of political prisoners has been put forward several times by the special U.N. representative Ibrahim Gambari, whose actions the Chinese government has always declared it supports," spokesman Gianni Giovanetti added in a statement.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said Beijing supported dialogue and hoped to see a stable Myanmar, but repeated that it opposed efforts to force the regime's hand.

"The international community should respect the Myanmar government's sovereignty and opinions when looking at its problems," spokesman Qin Gang told a news conference.

Fassino said that despite its opposition to sanctions, China was playing a "very important role" in steps toward a resolution to the crisis. These include talks between the junta and the U.N.'s Gambari, and Myanmar's naming of a go-between with Suu Kyi.

"We are aware that in order to achieve these first steps, the Chinese intervention has been essential," he said.

"I made clear (to the Chinese) that these are not our goal, they are a tool," said Fassino, who held talks with Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister He Yafei and the head of the Communist Party's International Department, Wang Jiarui.

Fassino said he had requested from Myanmar that he be allowed to visit in March.

"Actually I do not believe the Burmese crisis is over," he said. "To the contrary, we have to engage on the Burmese issue when the situation is not overheated."

Fresh bird flu outbreak detected in Myanmar

AFP - 29 December 2007

YANGON: Military-ruled Myanmar has detected a new outbreak of bird flu among chickens in the country's eastern Shan state, an official and state media said on Saturday.

Authorities confirmed the outbreak of the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus on Thursday after an unspecified number of chickens had died in Yankham village, 580 kilometres (360 miles) northeast of Yangon, the official said.

"We killed more than 1,000 chickens, and so far found no case of human infection," said the official from the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department in Yangon.

On December 15, Myanmar and the World Health Organisation announced that a seven-year-old girl from Shan state had become the first confirmed human case of bird flu in the country.

She was hospitalised in late November before being discharged in December after showing signs of recovery, health authorities said.

The official said that the area of the latest bird flu outbreak was located around 60 kilometres southeast of the village where the girl was infected with the virus.

Myanmar Should Take 'Bold Steps' to Address Inational Crisis – UN Envoy

UN News Centre, New York - 18 December 2007

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser for Myanmar has urged authorities in the South-East Asian country to take bold action to press ahead with an all-inclusive national reconciliation process.

Speaking to reporters in New York after briefing the General Assembly, Ibrahim Gambari emphasized that it is very important for Myanmar not to go backwards or stay still but to move forward and take "very bold steps" to address the concerns of the international community.

Mr. Gambari stressed that the goal is an all-inclusive reconciliation process, as well as "a stable, prosperous, democratic Myanmar with full respect for the human rights of its people."

As for specific steps the authorities should take, he cited the need for a time-bound and substantive dialogue between the Government and detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Once again calling for Ms. Suu Kyi's release, he added that she should be allowed to meet with members of her party's executive committee.

It is also necessary for the constitutional drafting process to be opened up so that those who are excluded from, or decided not to participate in, the current process can do so before the constitution is finally drafted, Mr. Gambari stated.

In addition, he urged the authorities to address the underlying socio-economic grievances of the people of Myanmar, adding that that was why the UN had proposed the establishment of a broad-based poverty alleviation commission to look into the root causes of discontent and address them.

The Special Adviser once again stressed that all detainees should be released since "it would be counter-productive not to release them or to arrest new people because the process of national reconciliation in an all-inclusive manner will not be served."

He said he had been informed that some detainees had been released, including some monks, as recently as yesterday.

While a date for Mr. Gambari's return to Myanmar is still being decided, he said he expected to be back in the country by next month.

Secretary-General convenes meeting of 'Group of Friends' on Myanmar

UN News Centre - 19 December 2007

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today convened the first meeting of a group of 14 nations to assist him in his efforts to spur change in the troubled South-East Asian nation.

The "Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar" will be "a consultative forum for developing a shared approach in support of the implementation of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate," UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters.

Consisting of Australia, Indonesia, Russia, United States, China, Japan, Singapore, Viet Nam, France, Norway, Thailand, India, Portugal and the United Kingdom, the Group will meet as needed in an informal format, she added.

Also attending today's meeting was the Secretary-General's Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari.

China, EU officials meets on Myanmar issue

Xinhua - 19 December 2007

Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China (CPC), met here on Wednesday with Piero Fassino, the EU Special Envoy for Myanmar.

According to a press release, the two exchanged views on the current Myanmar situation and briefed each other's standpoint on the issue.

Wang said China wanted to see stability, democracy, development and reconciliation achieved in Myanmar. It was willing to continuously make constructive efforts for the issue.

He also urged the international community to make efforts to enhance mutual trust and push forward dialogue with Myanmar.

Fassino said the EU appreciated China's contribution to maintaining a stable situation in Myanmar. He hoped to keep close communication and collaboration with China and other Asian countries.

The Italian, who was appointed the EU's special envoy on November 6, was on an Asian tour that started with China to discuss the Myanmar issue. He was also expected to visit India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

'No progress' in Burma says NLD

BBC News - 18 December 2007

The Burmese opposition has said that there has been no sign of any dialogue with the military government for the past month.

National League for Democracy (NLD) spokesman Nyan Win told the BBC he had not been allowed to speak to detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Mr Win said he knew nothing of any further contact between Ms Suu Kyi and the military government.

Myanmar may delay Charter

Manila Times – 20 December 2007

Tumultuous Myanmar holds the fate of Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Charter in its hands, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo said Wednesday.

At a Christmas luncheon with reporters, Romulo said the ratification of the Asean Charter hinges on proof that Myanmar is following its promised "roadmap to democracy."

The charter refers to the proposed organic law for all 10 Asean members, which include the Philippines. It was drafted by senior officials of the member nations, and adopted and signed by the Asean leaders at the 13th Asean Summit in Singapore on November 20.

Romulo said Myanmar promised compliance with a roadmap to democracy 10 or 11 years ago, "and they have been repeating the promise every year. But every year since Secretary [Domingo] Siason was there, it's up to them, not the nine members. We are just waiting."

"You know the role that the President played in stating the need for Myanmar to show that it has truly made important steps in the roadmap to democracy. The more important step is the freeing of Suu Kyi, as well as the inclusion in the Constitutional and democratic process," he said.

Romulo said they may or may not seek the ratification of the Asean Charter in Congress, but they are hoping that Myanmar would follow the preconditions.

"We told the Asean members that we may have a difficult time in getting our treaty-making body in the legislature to ratify and concur with the Asean Charter unless there are really major steps in implementing the roadmap to democracy," he said.

Romulo recounted that when they were in Singapore, Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago, who heads the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, said they may have a difficult time ratifying the Asean Charter.

"It is up to Myanmar to show that meaningful and significant steps have been taken starting with the freeing of Suu Kyi, and the inclusion of the NLD in the democratization and constitutional process," he said.

UN envoy for Myanmar to report to UN General Assembly

DPA – 17 December 2007

New York - The United Nations envoy for Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, is scheduled to discuss his diplomatic troubleshooting in the Asian nation with the UN General Assembly on Tuesday, in the first such session since the military junta in that country crushed pro- democracy demonstrations in September.

Gambari will present an "overall" report on his three trips to Southeast Asia, including two visits to Myanmar to carry out his mission of encouraging democratic reform in the country ruled by a military government for decades.

Spokesman Janos Tisovszky said Monday that representatives are to question Gambari on his mission in the closed-door meeting at UN headquarters.

"It will be an informal and closed meeting in which governments will also address the situation," Tisovszky said.

UN Envoy Holds Talks on Myanmar with Senior Officials in Washington

UN News Centre, New York - 17 December 2007

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Myanmar is in Washington, D.C., today for talks with senior United States officials, including the country's First Lady Laura Bush, on United Nations efforts to promote democratic change in the South-East Asian nation.

Ibrahim Gambari met this morning with Mrs. Bush and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley to discuss the world body's efforts in the context of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate for Myanmar, UN spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters.

Mr. Gambari is also scheduled to meet with the US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns.

Mr. Gambari will be at UN Headquarters in New York tomorrow, when he is scheduled to provide an informal briefing to the General Assembly on his efforts.

Bush likely to cancel US ASEAN summit over Myanmar: diplomats

AFP - 17 December 2007

WASHINGTON - US President George W. Bush likely will cancel a summit he was planning with Southeast Asian leaders, following Myanmar's bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests, ASEAN diplomats said here Sunday.

American officials indicated at a US-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) senior officials dialogue in San Francisco about a week ago that "it would be difficult for President Bush to host the summit" which would have been held at his Texas ranch, an ASEAN diplomat told AFP.

"Considering what happened in Myanmar, we understand that it might also be politically sensitive to hold such a summit on US soil, especially during an electoral year," the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Bush made the summit proposal on September 7 when he met several ASEAN leaders at the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit in Sydney.

About three weeks later, Myanmar's military rulers launched a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests led by Buddhist monks.

Bush has already ordered two round of sanctions and threatened further US-led global measures against the ruling junta if it continued to ignore calls for a democratic transition.

White House national security spokesman Gordon Johndroe had said at the time that all ASEAN heads of state had been invited, except Myanmar, whose "level of participation is to be determined."

Some ASEAN diplomats said if the Texas summit was off, Southeast Asian leaders might still try to host a meeting with Bush, adding that Washington was open to such a possibility.

"The fact that US still wants to consider having it in the ASEAN region shows they still understand the importance of engaging with ASEAN," one diplomat said.

"But the crux of the issue -- Myanmar -- remains and it will continue to be messy, especially if Washington insists Myanmar should stay out of the talks and ASEAN surely feeling uncomfortable with that," the official said.

Canada enforces sanctions on Myanmar

AFP - 14 December 2007

OTTAWA — Canada bolstered its sanctions against Myanmar Friday to punish its military regime for failing to make reforms after its violent crackdown on pro-democracy protestors drew worldwide condemnation.

"Despite repeated calls by the international community to return democracy to Burma, the Burmese regime has been completely unwilling to undertake genuine reform," said Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier, referring to Myanmar by its old name.

"With the new sanctions now in effect, we have the toughest sanctions in the world," he added, in a statement announcing that the measures, drafted last month, had come into force.

"The regime continues to show a complete disregard for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Burma," he added. "We believe that sanctions are the means by which we can best exert pressure on the military junta."

The measures include bans on exports from Canada to Myanmar except humanitarian goods, and on Canadians investing and providing financial services there, and a freeze on assets in Canada of Myanmar nationals linked to the rulers.

It also bans Burmese ships and planes from docking or landing in Canada.

"Our sanctions show Canada's commitment to promoting freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as our solidarity with the Burmese people," said Bernier.

"Canada urges others to undertake the strongest possible measures against Burma until the Burmese authorities implement genuine reform."

UN rights council wants second fact-finding mission to Myanmar

AFP - 15 December 2007

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council has put fresh pressure on Myanmar by asking special envoy Paulo Sergio Pinheiro to stage a second mission to investigate abuses during the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy protesters.

The body, in a unanimous resolution on Thursday, also asked the country's military rulers to free all detained political prisoners, ensure basic rights and allow humanitarian workers unrestricted access.

It said Pinheiro should quickly stage a follow-up visit "in order to assess with greater detail the human rights violations."

State Militias given riot control training

Irrawaddy- 14 December 2007

The Burmese military junta has been giving riot control training to state-backed organizations, according to sources in Rangoon.

Members of the Ward Peace and Development Council, the Union Solitary and Development Association (USDA) and Swan Arr Shin were instructed to attend the training. Firemen, municipal employees and members of the newly formed state-backed youth organization were also told to take part.

"We were instructed in how to systematically crack down on crowds," a member of Swan Arr Shin told The Irrawaddy. "We were shown how to beat crowds in the event of mass protests. We were trained by military instructors."

Trainees were not paid to attend instruction sessions, which were held daily from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m. Over a period of two months. Training will resume in 2008, an instructor said.

"If we did not attend, we were registered as absent, and that could threaten our job security," said a municipal employee.

The junta used state-backed mass organizations like the USDA to assist in suppressing demonstrations in August and September. They were also involved in the attack on Aung San Suu Kyi and her convoy in Depayin, Sagaing Division, northern Burma, in May 2003.

EU envoy to Myanmar to visit China and tour Asian nations

DPA - 12 December 2007

Brussels - The European Union's envoy to Myanmar plans to visit China next week as part of his efforts to convince Myanmar's ruling junta to move towards "a stable democracy".

Piero Fassino, a former Italian justice minister, said Wednesday in Brussels that China and other Asian states had a key role to play in the region.

"China is a great political power and is playing an increasingly essential role on the international scene. It can certainly have a positive influence in the Myanmar issue," Fassino said.

The envoy was expected in Beijing on Tuesday and Wednesday and planned to travel to India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam after the Christmas break.

Speaking after holding talks in Brussels, the envoy said Myanmar needed to initiate "a process of national reconciliation" and called on the ruling regime to lift all restrictions on opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

In order to help Myanmar's transition towards democracy, Fassino planned to hold talks with all the key players in Myanmar, including government figures, opposition leaders and religious as well as civil authorities.

A visit to Myanmar was being planned "for the coming months", Fassino said, adding that the "most opportune moment" for making such a visit would be decided together with his United Nations counterpart, Ibrahim Gambari.

Leading Thai Politician Calls Multiparty Talks on Burma

Associated Press – 13 December 2007

As Thailand heads toward December 23 elections, the leader of the most popular political party proposed Thursday that the country host an international summit to resolve the Burma crisis if he becomes prime minister.

Samak Sundaravej, head of the People's Power Party, said Thailand should hold a conference modeled after six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Polls show that PPP is likely to win the most seats in Thailand's 480-seat parliament.

Foreign affairs have been a non-issue during the campaign, but Samak said in an interview with AP Television News that as head of government he would propose multiparty talks with Burma which sparked global outrage after violently suppressing pro-democracy protests in September.

In addition to Thailand and Burma, he said they should use Singapore, the United States, France, Japan and China, including countries that he thought could influence Burma because of investment and trading ties.

"Let's talk. Let them (the junta) know that they can't live like that in the world," said Samak, a 72-year-old veteran politician known as a right-winger with a sharp tongue.

Samak said his approach would be "soft pressure" on Burma, since economic sanctions imposed by the US and other countries have failed to coax reforms.

Yudhoyono, Ban Ki-moon support democratic process in Myanmar

ANTARA News - 13 December 2007

Nusa Dua - President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon have agreed to help the democratic process in Myanmar in order to guarantee national unity and integrity in that country.

"Myanmar has entered the fourth phase of the seven stages that it has to pass in the democratic process in that country," Presidential Spokesman for International Relations Dino Patti Djalal said after attending the two leaders' meeting here on Thursday.

Dino said both leaders during their one-hour meeting stressed the importance of the continuation of the democratic process in Myanmar.

For the purpose, both leaders also emphasized the need for Myanmar's government and opposition to increase dialogs. Yudhoyono hoped the dialogs would proceed without barriers.

In the meantime, Ban Ki-moon hoped that the democratic process in Myanmar would continue. The United Nations had already set schedules for deliberations on Myanmar.

According to Dino, the agenda was expected to be discussed in December.

Myanmar charges activist with "public mischief"

Reuters – 13 December 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's junta has charged social activist Ko Htin Kyaw, arrested in August for staging a two-man protest against declining living conditions, with "public mischief," his lawyer said on Thursday.

The 40-year-old, who has been on a two-week prison hunger strike to demand the release of detained monks and other civilian protesters, would have his first hearing next week and could be jailed for two years, advocate Aung Thein told Reuters.

Ko Htin Kyaw had already been detained four times this year for similar protests demanding better living conditions in the former Burma and criticizing the ruling military's handling of a once-promising economy.

Ko Htin Kyaw, a mechanical engineer by training, was moved to go on hunger strike by the sight of hundreds of monks and civilians held without charge in Yangon's notorious Insein Prison after the crackdown, Aung Thein said.

"He demanded their release. When his demand was not met, he started staging a hunger strike from November 30," he said.

Very few charges have been laid against any of those detained, although one monk in the northwest coastal city of Sittwe was sentenced in October to 7- years in jail for inciting a public protest.

Myanmar's neighbours cautious about condemning rights abuse

Malaysia Sun - 13 December 2007

There was a clear division between countries at the Human Rights Council while discussing the findings of a report on the human rights situation in Myanmar, with Asian neighbours preferring a more cautious and non-condemnatory tone.

'India has consistently maintained that all initiatives taken in this connection should be forward looking, non-condemnatory and seek to engage the government of Myanmar in a non-intrusive and constructive manner,' said Swashpawan Singh, India's permanent representative to the UN.

Bo Qian of China noted that the government of Myanmar had resumed dialogue to push forward the seven-step process towards democratisation.

'This had not been an easy task. The international community should be patient and understand the difficulties faced in the national reconciliation process,' Bo said.

The Malaysian delegate, Mohamed Zin Amran, said the council should respond positively to the ongoing efforts undertaken and the clear commitment given by the government by 'adopting, if at all necessary, a forward looking, constructive and consensus approach that could result in meaningful improvements on the ground for the people of Myanmar'.

Speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Tehmina Janjua of Pakistan said there was no need for an international commission of enquiry to go to Myanmar as the UN secretary-general's special advisor and special rapporteur had been given positive responses from the Myanmar government.

Erlinda F. Basilio of the Philippines said greater and quicker progress was required towards the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the full and free participation of political parties in the political process, and the peaceful return to democracy.

'This might take time and it was important to recognise the unique local situation and economic and social challenges and acknowledge steps forward,' Basilio said.

UN Expert Pleads With Myanmar For Dialogue On Human Rights

Associate Press - 12 December 2007

GENEVA --The U.N. special investigator for Myanmar pleaded with the country's military junta Wednesday to engage in a serious dialogue about human rights.

"We know that we have a problem," Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, who recently visited the country, told Myanmar's ambassador at a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Pinheiro said he was disappointed by Myanmar's reaction to a report he formally presented to the 47-nation body on the government's deadly crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in September.

The report released last week found at least 31 people were killed - more than double the number acknowledged by authorities. Pinheiro said the death toll was probably much higher.

Wunna Maung Lwin, Myanmar's U.N. ambassador in Geneva, said late Tuesday "exercising its sovereign right to handle a violent situation should not be construed as a violation of human rights."

Pinheiro, a Brazilian professor, said he expected a better response.

"Your government has to make some concessions in terms of recognizing some of the points of my report," he told Wunna Maung. "The problem of thousands of detentions of people

without a reasonable basis, and the question of the use of force, necessity and proportionality - I didn't invent these."

He said he was "deeply disturbed" by Pinheiro's findings.

"It provides alarming details about the Burmese authorities' crackdown on demonstrations by monks and democracy activists and the severe reprisals that continue today," Bush said. "He describes how the regime harassed, detained, and killed many peaceful demonstrators."

Cambodian leader blasts report, says UN should leave Myanmar alone

Associated Press - 12 December 2007

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: The U.N. should leave Myanmar alone and stop disrupting the junta's progress toward democracy by issuing critical reports on human rights abuses, Cambodia's leader said Wednesday.

"Myanmar has been moving smoothly ahead," Prime Minister Hun Sen said, becoming perhaps the first national leader to publicly praise the country's military junta since its bloody September crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

Hun Sen, whose government is regularly criticized for human rights abuses, lashed out at a report released Friday by U.N. human rights investigator Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.

The report found that at least 31 people were killed during the Myanmar crackdown, twice the toll acknowledged by the junta. It also said that 650 people remained in custody and another 74 people were missing.

Hun Sen said the report did nothing but "disturb" Myanmar's efforts toward reform.

"If you just keep opposing and pressuring (Myanmar), how can it solve its own problems?" Hun Sen said during a speech at the inauguration of a government women's dormitory.

"Leave them some space to work," Hun Sen said, adding that he believed the junta's goals for the future match the U.N.'s. "They also want to have national reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights."

Last week, Hun Sen hosted a visit by Myanmar's prime minister, Lt. Gen. Thein Sein, during which he reiterated a long-standing opposition to economic sanctions against Myanmar.

Bush warns Myanmar of world sanctions

Agence France Presse - 12 December 2007

The United States will spearhead a global campaign to step up sanctions against Myanmar's military regime if it continues to ignore calls for a democratic transition, President George W. Bush warned Tuesday.

The threat came after the US House of Representatives Tuesday adopted sanctions against Myanmar's multi-million dollar gemstone exports and natural gas industry, in response to the military junta's lethal crackdown on September pro-democracy protests.

Bush repeated his call for the regime to release all political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest.

He said he was "deeply disturbed" by a report from UN human rights expert Paulo Pinheiro, who made his first visit to the country in four years in November.

The report documented the regime's deadly suppression of peaceful protests which drew an international outcry, including from the UN Security Council.

"Mr. Pinheiro's report demonstrates why the world cannot go back to business as usual with General Than Shwe and his junta," Bush said in a statement.

"I call on all members of the international community to condemn the atrocities detailed in Mr. Pinheiro's report in the strongest possible terms," the US president said.

Bush announced new sanctions against Myanmar's military recently, including an asset freeze on key junta figures and blacklisting of seven companies and five individuals allegedly linked to those companies and the regime.

"Should the regime continue to ignore calls for a true democratic transition and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, the United States is prepared to lead international efforts to place more sanctions on the regime," he warned.

US House adopts sanctions on Myanmar's gem, energy industries

AFP - 11 December 2007

WASHINGTON - The US House of Representatives on Tuesday unanimously adopted sanctions against military-ruled Myanmar, targeting the country's multi-million dollar gemstone exports and natural gas industry.

The sanctions also freeze the assets of Myanmar's political and military leaders and prevents them or their immediate families from using US financial institutions via third countries, officials said.

Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle in the US House of Representatives hailed the sanctions legislation, called "Block Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act."

It will stop the junta's practice of avoiding US sanctions by "laundering" gemstones through third countries for sale here and end tax write-offs enjoyed by US energy giant Chevron on revenues earned from its natural gas project in Myanmar.

"Today's legislation hits these military dictators where it hurts -- in the pocketbook," said Tom Lantos, the Democratic head of the House foreign affairs committee and author of the bill.

Myanmar's state-run mining firms export rubies, sapphires, pearls, jade and precious stones reportedly worth tens of millions of dollars.

The cut off in tax deductions for Chevron's major gas investment in Myanmar closes a loophole and increases pressure on America's allies to demand that firms based within their borders also divest themselves of Myanmar holdings, a House of Representatives statement said.

"It is singularly appropriate that this piece of legislation was passed just after International Human Rights Day (on Monday)," Lantos said.

"The peaceful protesters of Burma are human rights heroes, and the reprehensible military dictators ruling them deserve to be nothing less than international pariahs for their dismal human rights record," he said.

The US Senate also has a bill seeking sanctions against the junta but has not been voted on. The two bills could be reconciled, congressional aides said.

UN chief tells Myanmar the world's patience is running out

Associated Press - 10 December 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Myanmar on Monday that the international community is running out of patience, saying the junta must embrace democracy and stop inflicting suffering on its own people.

"I know the international community is very much impatient, and our patience is running out," Ban told a news conference in Bangkok.

"The people of Myanmar have suffered from isolation for such a long time and it's high time now that the Myanmar authorities and the people ... enjoy democracy and freedom."

"I would like to emphasize that the return to status quo is not acceptable, and is politically unsustainable," Ban said, without specifying if the U.N. planned to toughen its stance against Myanmar.

Ban's strong comments were the latest of many rebukes he has directed at Myanmar's generals, but the junta has a long-standing history of ignoring the U.N.

He reiterated the U.N.'s call for the junta to hold reconciliation talks with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who has been under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years.

Ban appealed to the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations to play a key role in coaxing Myanmar, which is one of the group's members, toward democratic reforms.

"We need ASEAN's special cooperation," Ban said. "ASEAN has a special political responsibility in promoting further democratization."

ASEAN, which has a traditional policy of not interfering in members' domestic affairs, has been criticized for not doing enough to pressure Myanmar's military leaders.

Myanmar stepping up attacks on insurgents: rebel group

AFP - 10 December 2007

BANGKOK - Military-ruled Myanmar has stepped up its offensive against ethnic Karen rebels following a crackdown on pro-democracy protests in September, one of the main insurgent groups said Monday.

The Karen National Union (KNU) said that Myanmar's military began the offensive about one year ago, but that the attacks have intensified since October.

The KNU accused the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) of waging a "genocidal war" against ethnic Karen villagers, saying thousands of people have had to flee their homes to escape the fighting.

"In the offensives, the SPDC army troops ... perpetrate the heinous crimes of arresting and killing innocent Karen civilians, plunder, destruction, forced relocation, forced labor and extortion of money," the KNU said in a statement.

"The current military campaign is in fact a genocidal war and it is diametrically opposed to the process of resolving the political problems by political means," it said.

The KNU is the largest rebel group fighting Myanmar's armed forces and one of the few remaining ethnic insurgent groups yet to sign a peace deal with the junta.

Myanmar, under military rule since 1962, has signed ceasefires with 17 other ethnic armed groups.

Laura Bush calls for democracy in Myanmar

AFP – 10 December 2007

WASHINGTON - US First Lady Laura Bush on Monday called on Myanmar's military rulers to free democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and urged the country's neighbors to pile pressure on the regime for political freedoms.

Surrounded by some of US President George W. Bush's top foreign policy advisers for Asia, Laura Bush said junta leader Than Shwe had offered "only token gestures" of reform in the face of a tightening international squeeze.

"If he and the generals are serious, they should give Aung San Suu Kyi unlimited access to the diplomatic community and other members of the Burmese opposition," she said.

"She and other political leaders should be released immediately and unconditionally so they can plan a strategy for Burma's peaceful transition to democracy," said Laura Bush.

She was speaking to the founder of a clinic in Thailand that provides to people fleeing from Myanmar in a videoconference call marking International Human Rights Day.

"President Bush and I call on all nations, especially Burma's neighbors, to use their influence to help bring about a democratic change," said the first lady.

"Especially on Human Rights Day, we stand with the courageous people who are standing up for democracy and justice in Burma," she said, pushing the junta to engage the opposition in a "serious dialogue" and free political prisoners.

"If Than Shwe and the generals cannot meet those very basic requirements, then it's time for them to move aside and make a clear path for a free and democratic Burma," she said.

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the US envoy on North Korea; Jim Jeffrey, the US deputy national security adviser; and the top US National Security Council (NSC) hand for Asia, Dennis Wilder attended the call.

Manila links Suu Kyi's release to ASEAN ratification

Reuters -06 December 2007

The release of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will be a key factor in the Philippines' decision to ratify a new charter for a regional grouping, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has said.

Arroyo, striking a tough posture, told the Financial Times that Myanmar's military rulers must comply with the human rights elements in the charter of the Association of South East Asian Association (ASEAN) by speeding the move toward democracy.

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She said the release of Suu Kyi, who has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest, will be the "number one benchmark" for Manila to decide whether to ratify the charter of the 10-member grouping that was signed at its meeting last month.

The charter needs ratification by all 10 ASEAN members before an economic and security bloc encompassing 560 million people can be established.

Despite the chorus of outside disapproval, Myanmar's rulers have made clear they do not intend to do anything outside the framework of a seven-step democracy roadmap, which the West says will simply solidify the military's grip on power.

At least 15 people died in a crackdown on anti-junta protests in September crackdown, drawing unprecedented international criticism and pressure to embark upon meaningful democratic reform including the release of political detainees.

Burma crackdown killed at least 30

Reuters— 07 December 2007

Burma's crackdown on democracy protests in September killed at least 31 people, three times the official count, with up to 4,000 arrested and 1,000 still detained, a report by a UN rights envoy showed today.

The report, to be presented to the UN's Human Rights Council on December 11th, said Burma's military rulers used "excessive force" in quelling the monk-led street protests and had violated "fundamental rules of international law."

The 77-page report, written by UN special rapporteur Paulo Sergio Pinheiro following his November 11-15 fact-finding visit, is among the fullest accounts to date of the suppression of the country's largest uprising since 1988.

Mr Pinheiro cited "very disturbing" accounts of a large number of bodies, wrapped in plastic and rice bags, burned at a crematorium in Yangon, including the bodies of monks, on the nights of September 27-30 to hide the number killed.

Official media in Burma have only acknowledged that 10 people died in the crackdown. Mr Pinheiro said authorities confirmed to him 15 deaths and he found evidence of a further 16 people killed in street demonstrations.

The report cites at least 74 cases of "enforced disappearance" where Burma's authorities are either unable or unwilling to account for the whereabouts of individuals. Along with live ammunition and rubber bullets, authorities used a range of weapons against protesters including tear gas, smoke grenades, wooden sticks, rubber batons and slingshots, said the report obtained by Reuters.

Up to 4,000 people were arrested, compared to the official count of 2,927, while between 500 and 1,000 were "still detained at the time of writing," including 106 women, of whom six were nuns, it said.

Mr Pinheiro described large-capacity informal detention centers and said he had credible reports of a special punishment area known as "military dog cells" in Yangon's notorious Insein Prison. This consists of a compound of nine tiny isolation cells measuring 6-1/2 feet (two meters) by 6-1/2 feet (two meters) constantly guarded by a troop of 30 dogs. Its inmates were held in "degrading conditions," the report said. Cells lacked ventilation or toilets.

Detainees, mostly political prisoners, slept on thin mats on the concrete floor and were only allowed to bathe with cold water for five minutes once every three days, the report said. One detainee described being forced to kneel bare-legged on broken bricks and to stand on tiptoes for long periods.

Monks were disrobed and intentionally fed in the afternoon when they are religiously forbidden to eat, the report said.

Mr Pinheiro's findings contrasted with UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari's upbeat assessment on November 13th when he said the situation in Burma was improving.

Mr According to Pinheiro, state security groups continued to detain people suspected of roles in the protests, primarily through nocturnal home raids. The authorities were also rounding up family members, close friends and suspected sympathizers of protesters in hiding.

Monks threaten face-off with junta as Myanmar's constitutional drafting process begins

SEAPSN Net News - Dec 7 2007

Even as the UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari prepares to make his third trip there this month, and that the junta has released more than 8,500 prisoners as a "gesture to the United Nations and to celebrate progress on its long-awaited constitution", there are no signs of impending change.

Senior -General Than Shwe (the country's top leader) has exhorted the citizens to cooperate with the government in implementing the country's infamous "Roadmap to Democracy" with "patriotism, nationalism and union spirit". Drafting of the new constitution apparently began on Monday this week (3 December).

This has obviously won no praise for the junta. US State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey declared the US stand, "It is Than Shwe and his senior generals who are obstructing progress toward democratization in Burma. We condemn the Burmese regime's rejection of meaningful participation for Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and ethnic minority leaders in the process of drafting a national constitution." The opposition group, the National League for Democracy (NLD), condemned the junta for causing national prestige to plummet to a "very low level".

More alarmingly, the monks are getting increasingly incensed over the oppression, the latest being the forced closure of the largest AIDS hospice in Yangon last week and the continuing arrests and detention. Having initiated the protests in September, the monks have come out to declare that they are prepared to clash with the junta if the generals continue to shun international calls for reforms. This might send Myanmar into a meltdown. Also, contraband videos by two senior monks -Nyanissara and Kawvida -titled "The end of sinful people" are circulating well. These videos contain sermons condemning the despotic rule and warned of hellish retribution for the wicked.

In the light of such bad press, Myanmar is trying to manipulate the ASEAN in more embarrassing ways than at the ASEAN Summit. Incensed by the criticisms, Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan, Myanmar Information Minister, told the Committee of Culture and Information (COCI) of ASEAN "to unitedly distribute authentic and constructive information to resist the media influence of some powerful nations" at a meeting on Tuesday (3 December). He slammed the incendiary "Western" media for "inciting for instability in the country they want to interfere [in]" and abusing "biased information with negative views to tarnish the image of the country intentionally". Kyaw Hsan then called for counter-tactics by ASEAN's media so as to let "the international community correctly know about the ASEAN through communications and information techniques". He also said that a "correct" media which the ASEAN governments could bring about would bring about true "development of ASEAN".

Of course, given the ASEAN solidarity and policy of non-interference, it is expected that Myanmar's wishes may be heeded. It is significant that ASEAN has graced Myanmar with the

honour of holding the first ASEAN film festival in Yangon next week to celebrate the grouping's 40th anniversary.

China is expected to continue propping up the junta especially as two vital economic deals have been signed between both countries. This week, China beat India to the rights to buy natural gas from Myanmar's biggest field, Daewoo International Corp. (the operator of the field) said. Furthermore, China's Yunnan Joint Power Development Co. has inked an agreement with Myanmar's Electric Power Ministry to operate the power station at Shweli dam for 40 years. The Shweli dam is China's first build-operate-transfer hydropower project with the junta. It is reported that this dam project will adversely affect thousands of people and devastate the environment.

Ignoring Myanmar grievances a recipe for more unrest

Reuters - 06 December 2007

BANGKOK - Myanmar's ruling generals may face another "explosive" situation if they ignore the deepening domestic economic crisis which triggered mass protests against the regime this year, an expelled U.N. official said.

Charles Petrie, the top U.N. resident diplomat kicked out for highlighting the former Burma's economic woes, said the regime's refusal to acknowledge the grievances that fuelled the protests was a "pretty bad cocktail" that could lead to further unrest.

"There is this growing impoverishment and growing inability of people to meet their daily needs, which has the potential to be explosive," he told Reuters after leaving Yangon this week.

"The more people are impoverished, the less educated they are, the more they have to confront diseases that push them more into poverty, the more difficult the situation is to govern".

"If you take all these elements together, you don't necessarily have a train on a train track," said the 48-year-old Paris-born son of a British diplomat.

Petrie, whose five-year posting was due to end in next July, was told in November that his statement on U.N. Day the previous month had damaged Myanmar's image and he was no longer welcome.

"That is something I think is very dangerous for the regime not to understand," said Petrie, fearing that the generals could use violence again to clamp down on public anger.

Some would argue that my expulsion was part of that intimidation, basically making the point that if others champion your cause, we can also take care of them," he said.

Petrie said the mission of U.N. Special Envoy to Myanmar Ibrahim Gambari, who visited twice after the protests and is expected to return this month, "is becoming more complicated" but he did not see a loss of momentum.

"I think it's important that we continue banging at the same door, continue making the same points, continue attempting to engage, because there may be an aligning of different things that will allow for a breakthrough," he said.

Report: Myanmar crackdown deaths higher

Associated Press - 07 December 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - Myanmar's military gunned down far more than the 10 victims it says were killed in its September crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, a human rights report said Friday.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group, said it has documented the deaths of 20 protesters but believes that many more Buddhist monks, students and other civilians were killed and that hundreds remain in detention.

Without independent access to the country, it was impossible to determine exact casualty figures, the organization said.

"The crackdown is far from over. Harsh repression continues, and the government is still lying about the extent of the deaths and detentions," the group's Asia director Brad Adams said in a news release announcing the report.

Myanmar has said only 10 people died during the nationwide suppression of demonstrations led by Buddhist monks.

The United Nations and other organizations also believe the death toll was higher.

U.N. human rights investigator Paulo Sergio Pinheiro visited Myanmar last month and said that post mortems and other official information showed at least 15 people died in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city. He said the figure was not necessarily complete and that he did not know how many other people may have been killed in other parts of the country.

Human Rights Watch said its research, based on interviews with more than 100 witnesses, determined that security forces shot into crowds using live ammunition and rubber bullets, and beat marchers and monks, dragging them onto trucks bound for detention centers.

IMF sees limited sanctions impact on Myanmar

Reuters - Saturday, December 8

BANGKOK - Tighter Western sanctions imposed on army-ruled Myanmar after its bloody crackdown on democracy protests will have little direct impact on the economy, the International Monetary Fund said in a report.

"The overall impact is limited because of restrictions already in place and because the new sanctions cover only a small proportion of trade," the IMF said in its annual review of the former Burma's economy.

"Nevertheless, in labour intensive sectors such as tourism and textiles, a fall in demand could also have adverse consequences on employment, even if the overall macroeconomic impact is small," the report, seen by Reuters, said.

Higher gas sales have doubled the regime's foreign exchange reserves to \$2 billion, equal to eight months of imports, said the report completed last month after an IMF visit in August.

But despite its natural wealth, the nation of 56 million people is among the poorest in Asia, with per capita GDP of \$230 and pitiful spending on social services.

Officially, the economy grew at a galloping 12.7 percent last year, which the IMF said "appears implausible".

It estimated growth at 7 percent, driven by natural gas exports, higher agricultural output and construction projects such as the new capital, Naypyidaw.

The regime's five-year plan sees growth averaging more than 10 percent to 2010, but the IMF predicted 5.5 percent next year, dipping to 4 percent in later years.

A fiscal deficit of 4 percent of GDP, financed by printing money, would continue to fuel inflation of 20-30 percent a year, the highest in Asia, it said.

The IMF recommended targeted subsidies to improve living standards and urged the regime to embark on economic reforms.

These included liberalising the transport and sale of farm products, which account for 40 percent of GDP, and unifying a distorting exchange rate system.

The official rate is 5.5 kyat to the dollar, a 24,000 percent premium over the market rate of 1,300 kyat to the dollar.

How much of this advice the generals will heed was unclear.

The IMF said government officials were in "general agreement" with the fund, "but need to convince the chain of command".

Chinese bidder wins Myanmar natural gas rights

International Herald Tribune, France - December 5, 2007

SEOUL: China won the rights to natural gas from the biggest field in Myanmar, beating India in the race for resources among the two-fastest growing major economies.

Daewoo International, the operator of the field, picked a Chinese company as the preferred bidder to extract the gas, Daewoo International said in a regulatory filing, without naming the possible buyer. State-owned Indian companies own 30 percent of the field, which holds as much as 7.7 trillion cubic feet, or 218 billion cubic meters, of gas.

Gas commands a premium for fuel-hungry Asian nations as crude oil prices hover near \$100 a barrel. India and China are competing for oil and gas to supply the two most populous nations in the world.

Daewoo International is the operator of the A-1 and A-3 offshore blocks, in which it has a 60 percent stake. Korea Gas owns 10 percent of the areas, GAIL India holds 10 percent and Oil & Natural Gas owns 20 percent.

"Gas from the field has to be sold and if Daewoo has chosen China, in principle, I see nothing wrong with it," the chairman of Oil & Natural Gas, R.S. Sharma, said. "GAIL was dealing with the bit relating to getting the gas to India."

China, India, Thailand, South Korea and Japan are competing for a share of the gas supply in Myanmar as discoveries increase. Myanmar had about 19 trillion cubic feet of reserves last year, BP said in its annual energy report.

Gaffney, Cline & Associates, an energy consultant, certified that the A-1 and A-3 areas hold as much as 7.7 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Daewoo International is in talks to sell the gas to PetroChina, The Korea Economic Daily reported Nov. 27, citing Daewoo International's chief executive, Kang Young Won. Daewoo and PetroChina are discussing the price and may reach an agreement soon, Kang said in an interview with the newspaper.

China, Thailand and India have submitted bids to buy the gas through pipelines, while South Korea and Japan are interested in buying the fuel as liquefied natural gas, Cho Sang Yeon, a spokesman at Daewoo International, said March 21.

LNG is natural gas that has been chilled to liquid form, reducing it to one-six-hundredth of its original volume at minus 161 degrees Celsius (minus 259 Fahrenheit), for transportation by

ship to destinations not connected by pipeline. On arrival, it is turned back into gas for distribution to power plants, factories and households.

Rights group calls for arms embargo on Myanmar

Agence France Presse - 6 December 2007

NEW YORK: Human Rights Watch called on the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday to impose an arms embargo on Myanmar over the military regime's recruitment of child soldiers.

"Burma's army has recruited thousands of children to fill its ranks," Jo Becker, children's rights advocate at the New York-based rights watchdog, said in a statement.

"The Security Council needs to show Burma's generals that they cannot get away with such horrendous practices," she added.

The UN Security Council's working group on children and armed conflict is due to meet tomorrow to discuss a report by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that found "grave violations" against children in Myanmar, Human Rights Watch said.

Among the abuses were a pattern of underage military recruitment, it said.

"The Security Council should not be fooled by Burma's repeated promises to address the army's use of child soldiers," said Becker.

"Nothing short of an arms embargo is likely to make Burma's military government end all recruitment and use of children."

The United Nations has repeatedly accused Myanmar's military rulers of violating international law prohibiting the use of child soldiers and has in the past said it would consider targeted measures including an arms embargo.

US says Myanmar junta obstructing negotiations on new constitution

Associated Press - 04 December 2007

WASHINGTON: The United States accused Myanmar's rulers on Tuesday of standing in the way of moving toward democracy in that Southeast Asian country by denying Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders the right to help draft a national constitution.

In a prepared statement, State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said Suu Kyi made clear in a Nov. 8 statement from house arrest that she was "committed to meaningful and time-bound talks" with Senior Gen. Than Shwe and his junta under sponsorship of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "It is Than Shwe and his senior generals who are obstructing progress toward democratization in Burma," Casey said.

"We condemn the Burmese regime's rejection of meaningful participation for Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic and ethnic minority leaders in the process of drafting a national constitution," Casey said. He said it was clear that the generals "have no intention to begin a genuine, inclusive dialogue necessary for a democratic transition with these parties" despite demands from Myanmar's neighbors, U.N. adviser Ibrahim Gambari, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the U.N. Security Council.

Myanmar rejects calls to include Suu Kyi in reforms

Agence France Presse - 03 December 2007

Military-ruled Myanmar on Monday brushed off mass pro-democracy protests as "trivial" and refused to include detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in its own plodding reform plans.

Top officials spoke to reporters at the first press conference since the military staged a deadly crackdown on protests in September.

Buddhist monks and former student leaders led the protests in the main city of Yangon and in provincial towns around the country, in the biggest challenge to military rule in nearly two decades.

But Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan, the information minister, brushed off the protests as the work of "bogus" monks organised by exiled dissidents and the United States.

"Actually, the August-September protests were trivial for the whole country," Kyaw Hsan said.

"It is found with sound evidence that ex-convicted bogus monks got joined with anti-government groups inside and outside the country," he said.

"Those unrests and violence, not participated by the majority of the people and the majority of monks, have been put under control," he said.

Myanmar's national police chief Khin Yi said that the protesters had hoped to overthrow the government.

"The demonstrations and protests were planned and conspired months ahead to topple the government," Khin Yi told reporters.

He accused a non-government organisation called the Forum for Democracy in Burma of working with exiled dissidents to orchestrate the protests, and said the US embassy had also helped train the activists.

"The American Centre held a three-day training course on infiltrating and organising the public," he said.

"The uprisings dissolved within a very short time frame simply because the general public did not take part and our security forces were able to make pre-emptive strikes," he added.

But Kyaw Hsan rejected those calls, saying the junta would stick to its own self-styled "road map" to democracy.

A 54-member panel appointed by the junta began work Monday on drafting a new constitution, which the regime says will eventually lead to elections.

A National Convention of delegates also chosen by the military wrapped up 14 years of talks in September, laying out principles to be enshrined in the new charter.

There is no timeline for completing the charter, and Kyaw Hsan ruled out any role for Aung San Suu Kyi or her National League for Democracy (NLD) party, which won elections in a landslide victory in 1990.

"No assistance or advice from other persons is required," he said, adding that no changes to the National Convention's work would be considered.

"It is not reasonable or fair to amend those principles adopted by the delegates," he said.

Myanmar monks prepared for another bloodbath

Agence France Presse - 04 December 2007

WASHINGTON - Myanmar's Buddhist monks are prepared to face another bloody confrontation with the ruling military junta if the international community fails to force the generals to accept democratic reforms, an exiled monk with links inside Myanmar said on Monday.

US-based Ashin Nayaka, a key member of the International Burmese Monks Organization, said monks were a "symbol of hope" for reforms in Myanmar but were "forcibly disrobed, assaulted and killed" by the junta.

"If this continues unaddressed, further bloody confrontation is unavoidable," he told a hearing of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, a non-partisan panel appointed by the US president and leaders of Congress.

"The very existence of monastic life is being destroyed by the evil military regime and it will face bloodshed again, if the international community, including the UN Security Council, cannot find a collective and effective way to stop this evil regime from killings and arrests," he said.

Nayaka, a visiting scholar at Columbia University, said he had been working closely with U Gambira, the leader of the Alliance of All Burma Buddhist Monks and key leader of the September protests arrested by the junta last month.

He expressed regret that pressure by the international community on the junta had eased even as serious questions remained over the number of monks forcibly disrobed, imprisoned and killed following the protests.

"Where has the global outcry gone? This should be of grave concern for all governments worldwide. This is a moral crisis that Americans must stand for," he said.

Ten political prisoners among 8,500 freed in Myanmar

Reuters – 04 December 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's military junta has freed more than 8,500 prisoners, including at least 10 political detainees, official media and opposition sources said on Tuesday.

The releases, which began on Nov. 16 and ended on Monday, were aimed at "forging the national solidarity in the country and cooperation with international communities, including the United Nations," the New Light of Myanmar said.

An opposition source said 10 political prisoners were among those freed, but there were no details. Thirty-three Thais were also granted amnesties, the New Light of Myanmar said.

It was not clear if any of 8,552 released were arrested in connection with protests in August and September against soaring fuel prices.

National police chief Khin Yi told a news conference on Monday that 2,927 people, including 596 monks, had been arrested in the crackdown on the biggest anti-junta protests in nearly 20 years.

Eighty people, including 21 monks, remained in detention pending further investigations, he said. Unspecified "legal action" would be taken against those found guilty.