

News Summary October 2007

UN Envoy to Return to Myanmar on Saturday

UN News Centre, New York - Oct 31 2007

United Nations Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari is set to arrive in Myanmar on Saturday, his second visit to the South-East Asian nation since authorities used force in responding to a wave of peaceful protests that began in August.

The 3 to 8 November visit follows Mr. Gambari's recently concluded tour of Myanmar's regional partners that included stops in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China and Japan.

During his upcoming visit, Mr. Gambari will follow up on his offer to facilitate implementation of the recommendations made to the Government during his last mission, UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters in New York.

These include immediate steps to address human rights concerns in the wake of the recent crisis and a framework for meaningful and time-bound dialogue between the Government and Aung San Suu Kyi as a necessary part of an inclusive national reconciliation process.

A Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Ms. Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for four years, and has spent 11 years in detention since her party and its allies won the 1990 election with over 80 per cent of the Parliamentary seats.

The Special Adviser will also follow up on implementation of confidence-building measures, including the possibility of establishing a participatory constitutional review mechanism and a broad-based poverty alleviation commission.

"Mr. Gambari will consult with a broad range of representatives of Myanmar society, including all the groups which he was not able to see last time. He looks forward to the continued cooperation of the Myanmar government in this regard," Ms. Montas stated.

Prior to his arrival in Myanmar, Mr. Gambari will meet with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Friday in Istanbul, where they will discuss a substantive agenda and ways to facilitate the democratic process, including the release of detainees, she added.

Mandela withdraws from annual golf tourney over Myanmar links

AFP – 31 October 2007

JOHANNESBURG — The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund has withdrawn its involvement in the yearly Nelson Mandela Invitational Golf Tournament, fund officials said Wednesday.

This follows the controversy surrounding one of the tournament's participants and host, legendary golfer Gary Player, over his business involvement in Myanmar.

"As a result of our withdrawal the tournament can no longer be called the Nelson Mandela Invitational and should not be marketed as such in any form whatsoever," SAPA news agency quoted the Fund as saying in a statement.

"Of prime concern to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund is the protection of our founder's name, Nelson Mandela, and our associate organizations from the current controversy".

A few weeks ago the 72-year-old Player came under fire from Mandela's fellow South African Nobel peace prize winner Desmond Tutu over his company's construction of a golf club in Myanmar, with Tutu requesting that organisers withdraw the multiple majors winner from the fund-raising tournament to be held in November in the Western Cape.

"Consequently, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund would regrettably not be able to receive the benefits of the event nor any income derived from the event."

Player had defended himself by saying that his company had built the Pun Hlaing course in 2002 at a time when the military junta had temporarily released pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

Tycoon close to Myanmar junta not feeling sanctions

Yomiuri Shimbun – 30 October 2007

A mysterious tycoon lurks behind Myanmar's military government, which shows no sign of accepting demands from pro-democracy activists after a brutal crackdown on demonstrators a month ago, despite criticism from the international community. Sanctions by the United States and the European Union also seem to have had little impact, observers said.

Tay Za, said to be 43 years old, is known for his close relationship with the junta leadership. The United States earlier this month imposed fresh sanctions on Myanmar, freezing bank accounts of businesses close to the junta, apparently targeting Tay Za. But observers have said the sanctions will not sway the tycoon, who is said to be cunning enough to help the junta in skirting most U.S. and EU sanctions.

Tay Za built his fortune since 1990 through logging, teak log exports, hotels and tourism. The exact size of his fortune and personal details are not known, but his close proximity to the junta and its help in his success is well reported.

He is the owner of Air Bagan--in which the wife of the junta's leader, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, is an investor. Tay Za also is the only authorized import agent for the Russian military industry. He, together with Vice Senior Gen. Maung Aye, the junta's No. 2, clinched a deal to purchase MiG-29 fighter-bombers from Russia in 2002.

It also is rumored that Tay Za helped, through Air Bagan, Than Shwe's wife and others leave the country for locations such as Vientiane and Dubai during the peak of September's antigovernment demonstrations.

After the crackdown on the demonstrators, together with rumors of boycotts on Air Bagan, the number of tourists to Myanmar fell. Reeling from this blow, Air Bagan cut its Yangon-to-Singapore flight schedule from a flight a day to three a week.

However, Tay Za is said to have numerous subsidiaries, bank accounts and luxurious condominiums in Singapore, and he has "no trouble lending his money out," according to a source in Yangon. This diversification means the U.S. sanctions, which only freeze assets in the United States, probably will have little impact on the tycoon.

Myanmar: UN Envoy to Visit Earlier Than Planned

UN News Center, New York - Oct 23 2007

Myanmar has agreed to allow United Nations Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, who is currently touring regional capitals to garner support ahead of a planned visit to the country in mid-November, to visit even sooner, the spokesperson for the world body announced today.

Mr. Gambari "expects to visit Myanmar in the first week of November, as the Myanmar Government agreed to bring forward his standing invitation to the country," UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters in New York.

"While the exact travel dates have yet to be arranged, Mr. Gambari would be going to Myanmar directly from the region, continuing his consultations with key regional countries in the interim," she added.

Dispatched by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to consult with regional leaders on how to address the ongoing crisis in Myanmar, Mr. Gambari has met so far with officials in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Special Envoy was in New Delhi today where he met with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to whom he delivered a personal message from the Secretary-General.

The two leaders had "detailed and substantive discussions" on the UN's efforts in Myanmar and India's support in this regard, according to Ms. Montas.

Mr. Gambari "has been urging India and other regional countries to actively encourage the Government of Myanmar to continue to cooperate with the Secretary-General's good offices efforts, including by addressing continuing human rights concerns and by encouraging Myanmar to receive Mr. Gambari as early as possible in order to kick-start a dialogue with the opposition."

The Special Envoy is now on his way to Beijing, where he is scheduled to meet with senior officials before going on to Tokyo for consultations with Japanese counterparts.

Women peace laureates appeal for Myanmar action

Reuters - 23 October 2007

LONDON - Six female Nobel Peace laureates called on the world to keep up pressure on Myanmar's military junta to restore liberty and democracy in the country.

The seventh living female Peace Prize winner -- Aung San Suu Kyi -- is in detention in Myanmar, where she has spent nearly 12 of the last 18 years in prison or under house arrest.

"Since Burmese monks courageously took to the streets in September to call for democracy, the Burmese regime has enforced a vicious crackdown on peaceful demonstrators and democratic opposition leaders," the six wrote in a letter in Wednesday's edition of the Guardian newspaper, using the country's former name.

"The Burmese regime must not be allowed to continue in its perpetration of gross violations of human rights. The detention of Aung San Suu Kyi is the most visible manifestation of the regime's brutality but it is only the tip of the iceberg."

The letter was signed by Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire. It said it was supported by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright.

"Sixty-two years ago, the UN was established to enable governments of the world to respond to grave crises of this kind. It must now do more to live up to its mandate and take decisive action to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow prisoners of conscience," they wrote.

Congress panel approves Myanmar gem curbs

Reuters - 23 October 2007

WASHINGTON - A key U.S. congressional committee approved on Tuesday legislation tightening sanctions and visa bans on Myanmar's military junta and targeting the country's lucrative gemstone exports.

The amendment, which passed the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs without opposition, expands sanctions imposed in 2003 that halted U.S. trade with Myanmar to prohibit the sale in the United States of rubies, jade and other gems routed through Myanmar's neighbors.

"Millions of dollars in gemstones that are exported from Burma ultimately enter the United States but the Burmese regime attempts to conceal the origin of the gemstones in an effort to evade the sanctions," read the bipartisan amendment.

It noted that while 90 percent of the world's ruby supply comes from the country formerly known as Burma, only 3 percent of rubies that enter the United States have been identified as originating from that Southeast Asian state.

India Promises to Help Reconciliation in Myanmar

New York Times - Oct 23 1:10 PM

NEW DELHI, Oct. 23 — The Indian government described Myanmar on Tuesday as its “close and friendly neighbor” and said it would aid in Myanmar’s national reconciliation, even as the United Nations special envoy called on India to join other countries in pressing Myanmar’s military rulers to stop their campaign of repression against pro-democracy protesters.

Ibrahim Gambari, the United Nations’ top official assigned to Myanmar, told reporters here that he was “very satisfied” by India’s commitments.

“As a close and friendly neighbor, India has multidimensional linkages with Myanmar,” a Foreign Ministry statement read. “Consequently, initiatives should be mindful of the need for a peaceful and stable Myanmar.

India will continue to play a constructive and positive role, along with like-minded countries, to this end.”

Privately, Indian diplomats have said they have their own interests in maintaining good relations with the government in Myanmar, and pointed out that India has far less leverage than China. Not only is India eager to cash in on its neighbor’s substantial reserves of natural gas, but Indian officials say they also count on the government in Yangon to control anti-Indian insurgents along the countries’ border.

Myanmar still in fear as curfew lifted

21 October 2007 Agence France Presse

YANGON (AFP) — Residents in Yangon on Sunday welcomed the end of a curfew imposed on the eve of Myanmar's bloody crackdown on peaceful protests, but voiced fears in private over the country's iron-fisted junta.

The government ended the curfew Saturday in Yangon, Myanmar's main city, where authorities suppressed pro-democracy protests led by Buddhist monks in late September, killing at least 13 people and jailing about 3,000.

Residents said they were relieved to see the end of the nightly curfew, which lasted from 11:00 pm to 3:00 am, but confided that they did not yet feel that life had returned to normal.

"People are very happy about the end of the curfew. We are free now," said one company official in his 30s, who declined to be named.

"But people, including myself, continue to worry about the situation because of what happened in Yangon last month," he said.

The end of the curfew came as military-run Myanmar was under global pressure over the deadly clampdown on dissent, with the United States stepping up sanctions against the top generals including junta leader General Than Shwe.

Than Shwe has offered to meet with detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi in a move seen as the regime's effort to defuse international pressure following the violence last month.

But the junta chief has said the dialogue will follow only if the 62-year-old Nobel peace laureate gives up what he calls her support for "confrontation, utter devastation, economic sanctions on Myanmar and other sanctions."

On Sunday, the government demanded Aung San Suu Kyi drop her support for sanctions. She has publicly discouraged foreign investment in Myanmar in a bid to pile pressure on the ruling generals.

Myanmar, under military rule since 1962, tolerates little public dissent, but anti-junta rallies began in August following a massive hike in fuel prices and snowballed into the biggest challenge to the regime in nearly two decades.

A 55-year-old housewife said she was glad that the government lifted the curfew, but added she would stay away from Yangon's golden Shwedagon Pagoda, a rallying point for protesters.

"I would like to go to Shwedagon Pagoda, but dare not go there right now. I am too afraid," she said.

While authorities have sharply reduced the security presence around the pagoda, Myanmar's most important landmark, several plain-clothes officials were still standing guard on Sunday.

A 41-year-old mother of a teenage boy said she continued to fret about security despite the end of the curfew.

"My son is very happy because he can go out with his friends at night. But I am worried about the security situation. I asked my son not to stay outside too long," she said.

During the curfew shops closed early and Yangon's streets, normally bustling with people hanging out at tea shops late into the night, were eerily quiet.

One tea shop owner said he hoped more customers would return after the end of the curfew.

"My business suffered during the curfew because I had to close my shop around 9:00 pm, and most of all, we had very few customers," said the owner in his 50s.

Street tea shops are very popular for nights out among people in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest nations, where few people can afford to go to restaurants.

"I hope customers will return to my shop soon. I want my business to return to normal again," he said.

Apart from the curfew, the junta also cut the country's Internet links in a bid to curb the flow of images and information on the deadly crackdown being spread around the world.

Internet access was restored only recently, but the military government continued to ban foreign media, including the BBC and Voice of America, as well as news outlets run by exiled dissidents.

Myanmar panel to draft new constitution
Reuters October 19, 2007

YANGON, MYANMAR -- The military regime that rules Myanmar announced a commission Thursday to draft a new constitution as part of its "road map to democracy," an effort derided by critics as a sham to keep the generals in power.

Myanmar's state-owned television station said Chief Justice U Aung Toe would chair the 54-member commission, which includes civil servants and military officers, but gave no time frame for completing its work.

Stage one of the road map was a national convention to draw up the "detailed basic principles" of the charter, which was completed in September after 14 years of off-and-on meetings. Most of the process was boycotted by the National League for Democracy, the opposition party led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi remains under house arrest in Yangon, Myanmar's main city, also known as Rangoon, since her latest detention began in 2003. Her party won a landslide victory in the 1990 election only to be denied power by the army, which first seized power in 1962.

Most Western governments dismissed the convention as a charade to cement the junta's grip on power.

Snippets of the "detailed basic principles" of the charter appearing in state media point to little transfer of power to a civilian administration or autonomy for the 100-plus ethnic minorities in the country, also known as Burma.

Japan cancels large aid grant to Myanmar
The Associated Press: October 16, 2007
Japan canceled a multimillion-dollar grant to Myanmar on Tuesday to protest the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, as a UN envoy pressed Asian countries to take the lead in resolving the Myanmar crisis.
Japan, the largest aid donor to Myanmar, had earlier said that it would suspend some assistance in response to the death of a Japanese journalist, Kenji Nagai, among at least 10 people killed when troops fired into crowds of peaceful protesters during the Sept. 26-27 crackdown.
Video footage of Nagai's death, broadcast around the world, appeared to show a soldier shooting the journalist at close range on the streets of Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city.

A state-controlled newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, published an editorial Sunday that blamed Nagai for having "invited danger" by attending the protests.

In Tokyo, Nobutaka Machimura, the chief cabinet secretary, said that the government was canceling a grant worth ¥552 million, or \$4.7 million, for a business education center, planned for the Yangon University campus.

Machimura said that the decision had been made in response to the violent crackdown and followed a UN statement condemning the violence.

The UN Security Council issued its first-ever statement on Myanmar last week, condemning the brutal clampdown and calling for the release of all political prisoners.

The junta has been rounding up suspected dissidents since protests started in August.

Several thousand are believed to have been detained, including Buddhist monks who led the protests, and there have been many reports of brutal treatment in custody.

The UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari headed to Malaysia on Tuesday, the second stop in a six-country tour to coordinate key Asian governments' efforts to help resolve the crisis.

Arrests, interrogations and acts of intimidation "run counter to the spirit of mutual engagement between the United Nations and Myanmar," Gambari said Monday in Bangkok. "These actions must stop at once." Gambari is scheduled to travel to Indonesia, Japan, India and China before returning to Myanmar.

The National League for Democracy, the biggest opposition party, echoed the call to release political prisoners in a statement Monday that demanded an end to the "torture" of Buddhist monks, nuns, students and others.

Earlier this month Gambari met with the junta leader, General Than Shwe, to convey the world's outrage over the crackdown.

He also met twice with the detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 12 of the last 18 years. But his earlier trip failed to make headway. The UN wants the junta to start negotiations with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Red Cross seeks access

The International Committee of the Red Cross said Tuesday that it was seeking access to thousands of people detained during the recent crackdown in Myanmar, though the authorities there had not yet agreed to talks, according to a Reuters report from Geneva.

Pierre Kraehenbuehl, the ICRC director of operations, said the humanitarian agency had not yet been able to re-establish a meaningful dialogue with the ruling generals that have restricted its activities over the past two years.

"The ICRC is deeply worried about the fate of thousands of people who have reportedly been arrested," Kraehenbuehl said in a statement.

Malaysia Rules Out Myanmar Sanctions, Backs UN Talks (Update1)

By Angus Whitley

Oct. 16 (Bloomberg) -- Malaysia ruled out sanctions against Myanmar, its Southeast Asian neighbor, and pledged support for United Nations efforts to stop the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy campaigners.

"Nobody can talk when you are threatening with all sorts of things," Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told reporters today in Kuala Lumpur after meeting UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari. "We must leave it to the UN."

Japan's government said today it will cancel a 552 million-yen (\$4.7 million) grant to Myanmar, joining the U.S. and European Union in calling for restraint from the regime. Syed Hamid said Myanmar should hold further discussions with Gambari, though he stopped short of making specific demands of the junta.

Myanmar's military regime deployed soldiers on the streets of the former capital, Yangon, on Sept. 26 to crush the biggest anti-government protests in almost 20 years. Security forces clubbed and shot at demonstrators, and at least 30 people were killed, the Australian government said.

The introduction of democracy in Myanmar must be led by the people rather than imposed by other powers, Syed Hamid said. Engaging with Gambari, who met junta leaders this month, is the best way for Myanmar to win international support, he said.

The 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations won't eject Myanmar, Syed Hamid said today. Asean admitted Myanmar as a member in 1997, against U.S. and European wishes.

The bloc has been criticized by Western nations for not doing enough to promote democratic change in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

Trading Partner

Malaysia's trade with Myanmar in 2006 was worth 1.06 billion ringgit (\$313 million), the third-smallest total among Malaysia's Asean trading partners, the Malaysian government said. Gambari faces a "formidable task" trying to build consensus among Myanmar's neighbors and persuade the junta to take steps toward democracy, Asean Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong said in Singapore yesterday. The UN envoy is scheduled to visit Indonesia, India, China and Japan this week.

UK's Brown says may offer help economic to Myanmar

15 October 2007. Reuters

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said on Monday he was prepared to offer economic help to Myanmar if it began moves towards democracy.

"We are prepared to draw up a package of measures for the improvement of the Burmese economy, with other world leaders, that would be available if Burma is prepared to move towards democracy and reconciliation," Brown told reporters after accepting a petition from Myanmar pro-democracy campaigners.

Brown said he would be writing to world leaders on Monday to canvass support for such a proposal.

"I believe the gaze of the whole world will remain on the Burmese regime as long as people know about the violence being practiced against Burmese citizens," he said.

European Union foreign ministers meeting on Monday are due to consider widening EU sanctions from the existing asset freezes, travel bans and limited commercial embargoes to include trade in timber, gems and precious metals -- all major sources of revenue for the junta.

Two weeks ago pro-democracy protests in Myanmar, formerly Burma, were crushed by the military junta. Many protestors were arrested and some killed.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and his British counterpart David Miliband said in an article published on Monday it was important to offer incentives as well as threats.

"The EU needs to consider a package of positive measures to the Burmese people should the regime show its willingness to genuinely work for reconciliation," they wrote in the International Herald Tribune.

Brown was handed a petition at his London office signed by 750,000 people expressing outrage at events in Myanmar.

China urges continued calm in Myanmar; says willing to play "constructive role"

The Associated Press

Published: October 16, 2007

BEIJING: China urged continued calm in Myanmar and said Tuesday it was willing to play a "constructive role" in resolving the crisis.

Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said the recent calm in the troubled region was "the result of hard work and cooperation from all sides."

"We hope that Myanmar can continue to maintain the calm and to improve the people's lives and promote democracy and development," Yang told reporters along the sidelines of the 17th congress of the ruling communist party.

"We support the U.N. secretary general and his envoy's mediation," Yang said. "China is willing to play a constructive role." He did not elaborate.

At least 10 people were killed when troops fired into crowds of peaceful protesters during a Sept. 26-27 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations. Several thousand people are believed to have been arrested, and there have been many reports of brutal treatment in custody.

U.N. envoy Ibrahim Gambari was in Malaysia on Tuesday as part of a six-nation Asian tour to drum up support for his efforts to coax Myanmar's military government to reconcile with the

pro-democracy opposition.

He was scheduled to travel next to Indonesia and Japan, followed by India and China, which are two of the Myanmar junta's biggest allies.

China is a veto-wielding member of the U.N. Security Council, which issued its first-ever statement on Myanmar last week, condemning the brutal clampdown and calling for the release of all political prisoners.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said Tuesday that China welcomed Gambari's visit "at an early date" but said both sides were still discussing details.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/10/16/asia/AS-GEN-China-Myanmar.php>

Thailand proposes UN-backed multiparty talks on Myanmar
Agence France Presse: Mon 15 Oct 2007

Thailand on Monday proposed that the United Nations organise multiparty talks to bring together Myanmar's neighbours for discussions with the military junta on resolving the nation's crisis.

Thailand's army-installed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont said he made the recommendation during his talks with UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari, who is on an Asian tour aimed at winning support among Myanmar's neighbours for tougher action against the junta.

Surayud said the talks would bring together officials from the military regime and its neighbours China and India as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which counts Thailand and Myanmar as members.

"We suggested the United Nations should set up talks with ASEAN, China and India to end the unrest in Myanmar unconditionally... in the same way that the UN did for the North Korean (nuclear) talks," Surayud told reporters.

He urged Gambari to bring up the proposal with Chinese and Indian leaders as one way to search for practical solutions to Myanmar's troubles.

The military has ruled for 45 years in Myanmar, which is also known as Burma, but last month Buddhist monks led up to 100,000 people in the streets of Yangon in the biggest challenge to the regime for nearly two decades.

The regime responded violently, ordering soldiers into the streets in a crackdown that left at least 13 dead and more than 2,000 locked up.

Amid international outrage at the violence, the United Nations sent Gambari to Myanmar last month to meet with junta chief Than Shwe and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Gambari is set to return to Myanmar in mid-November, but Surayud said he would send a letter to the junta asking that the envoy be allowed to visit before the end of October.

"We will ask that he be allowed to stay there long enough for him to complete his mission," he added.

About 20 protesters gathered outside Surayud's offices as he met with Gambari.

Dressed in red, the colour of the student movement that led a 1988 pro-democracy uprising, they shouted, "Gambari, Free Burma!"

Some held pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent 12 of the last 18 years under house arrest, and waved placards saying "UN act now."

IPU Demands Release of Jailed Burma Parliament Members

VOA_10 October 2007

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is calling for the release of 26 parliament members jailed in Burma. The Inter-Parliamentary Union says the Burmese lawmakers include people who have been imprisoned for a long time as well as some who were jailed during the recent military crackdown of peaceful protesters. They say some of the MP's have served their complete sentences. But, before they were released, the Burmese authorities added two more years without any trial or due process. Senator Aquilino Pimentel of the Philippines, says everyone is aware of the plight of Pro-Democratic Leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. But, few people know that 26 elected Members of Parliament are languishing in prison.

"One half of that, the number of Parliamentarians, were recently arrested in connection with the recent crackdown of activism in the peaceful protest in Myanmar," he said. "So, we would like to make our colleagues in the Parliamentary world to realize that it is not only Aung San Suu Kyi who is being deprived of her liberty, but several Parliamentarians, as well as innocent civilians and Buddhist monks."

Senator Pimentel says the IPU Committee has contacts with people inside and outside Burma who keep it informed about what is happening in the country. "The latest information I received was this morning coming from some friends in Burma," he added. "And, they informed me that the crackdown continues even in the dead of the night. You know, the thugs of the regime knocking on the doors, even of the monasteries, trying to ferret out the activist monks and bring them to detention."

India: Closer links with Europe 'key to effective multilateral governance' says Italian FM

Adnokronos_10 October 2007

India, one of the world's major emerging economic powers and "model of secular democracy" needs to become a real European partner "in a post-2001 world dominated by global challenges," Italy's foreign minister Massimo d'Alema said on Wednesday in a keynote speech delivered in the Indian capital New Delhi. Addressing delegates at a conference on multilateralism and relations between Europe and Asia at the prestigious Indian Council for World Affairs think-tank, D'Alema laid out a five-point plan to turn India's "developing" relationship with Europe "into a strong one."

Referring to the violent military crackdown in Burma (also known as Myanmar) on peaceful protests led by Buddhist monks in which at least ten people have died and thousands have been detained in recent weeks, D'Alema urged India to "exert its material and moral influence in the region" to stop the killing of civilians and work for the country's democratisation. "The European reaction is more focused on respect for human rights," he said urging an "ethical realist" approach.

Reports say that India has been reluctant to criticise the Burmese military regime because of its strategic interests in the country. D'Alema met the president of the ruling Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi, on Wednesday and was scheduled to meet prime minister Manmohan Singh and external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee. Terrorism and trade were expected to top the meetings' agendas.

Myanmar Dissident Dies Under Questioning

AP_10 October 2007

A Myanmar opposition party member died during interrogation and two activists were arrested as the ruling junta pressed its crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, an exile group said Wednesday. The Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners also said security officers had been threatening dissidents' relatives and neighbors in an attempt to get information on the whereabouts of those involved in last month's anti-government protests, which were brutally suppressed by the military.

The Myanmar exile group, made up of former political prisoners, said authorities had recently informed the family of Win Shwe, 42, that he had died during interrogation in the central region of Sagaing. He and five colleagues had been arrested on Sept. 26, the first day of the crackdown. The group said Win Shwe, a member of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), was cremated at the detention center. The alleged death of Win Shwe drew a harsh reaction from the United States. Washington called for an investigation and threatened further sanctions against the impoverished country also known as Burma.

NEW UN SURVEY REVEALS SURGE IN MYANMAR'S OPIUM PRODUCTION

UN News_Oct 10 2007

A report released today by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime shows that while a decades-long eradication drive had slashed opium production in South-East Asia, cultivation in Myanmar has risen by nearly 30 per cent this year.

Presenting the 2007 report on opium cultivation in South-East Asia, UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa said that while the so-called Golden Triangle – comprising Laos, Myanmar and Thailand – is no longer a major supplier of opium, the situation in Myanmar is “extremely alarming.”

Thailand has been opium-free for almost 20 years and Laos has cut opium production by 94 per cent in less than a decade, according to the report. At the same time, opium cultivation rose by 29 per cent – and production by 46 per cent – in 2007 in Myanmar, thereby solidifying the country's position as the world's second largest opium producer after Afghanistan. The report revealed that opium cultivation is highly concentrated in one area of the Myanmar, namely South and East Shan states, which accounts for 90 per cent of all opium grown in the country, Mr. Costa said.

In addition, there has been a “dangerous switch” in drug production away from opium to a significant increase in methamphetamines which lead to greater profits than that generated by opium. He called for strengthening controls to prevent precursors from getting into Myanmar and for more forceful anti-corruption measures. It is also important for the international community to assist farmers so they can find alternative sources of income and thus abandon opium production, he added.

Demand for Suu Kyi's release rejected

Reuters - 09 October 2007

Myanmar's military junta suggested on Monday that opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi would remain under house arrest until a new constitution was approved -- a dim and distant prospect, according to most analysts.

A commentary in the New Light of Myanmar newspaper, the generals' official mouthpiece, also gave short shrift to the demands of the thousands who joined last month's protests.

"The three demands of the protesters -- lowering consumer prices, release of Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, and national reconciliation -- cannot be satisfied through protest," the paper said.

"Now, those responsible are making arrangements to draft the state constitution and collect the list of voters," it said. "When the state constitution is approved, the fulfilment of the three demands will be within reach."

Holding a referendum on a new constitution is the fourth stage in a seven-step 'roadmap to democracy'.

For Ms Kyi, who has spent nearly 12 of the last 18 years in prison or under house arrest, the omens are not good.

Stage one of the roadmap -- a national convention to draw up the 'detailed basic principles' of the charter -- took 14 years.

Stage two -- "step-by-step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic state" -- is so unclear that few know what it means.

NLD resists preconditions for talks with junta

Associated Press - 09 October 2007

The party of Burma's detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi issued a statement Tuesday calling for no preconditions for dialogue with the military junta.

The junta's leaders have offered to meet with Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, but only on condition she renounce calls for international sanctions against the military regime for its bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests.

"The success of a dialogue is based on sincerity and the spirit of give and take," said the statement by the National League for Democracy. "The will for achieving success is also crucial and there should not be any preconditions."

The statement, which follows similar statements by NLD figures, came after the junta said it hoped to achieve "smooth relations" with Suu Kyi, a day after suggesting that her release from house arrest was unlikely anytime soon.

Protests erupted August 19 after the government raised fuel prices, but anger mushroomed into nationwide marches by tens of thousands demanding democratic reforms.

The junta's troops crushed pro-democracy demonstrations with gunfire on September 26 and 27. The regime said 10 people were killed, but dissident groups put the toll at up to 200 and say 6,000 people were detained, including thousands of monks who led the rallies.

Global outrage was directed at the junta, with the international community condemning the crackdown and calling for the release of the 62-year-old Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate who has been under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years without trial.

The government announced last week that junta leader, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, was willing to meet personally with Suu Kyi, but only if she met certain conditions, including renouncing support for economic sanctions by foreign countries against the junta.

Than Shwe has only met with Suu Kyi once before, in 2002, and the talks quickly broke down.

China opposes UN sanctions, supports mediation in Myanmar

Deutsche Presse-Agentur - 09 October 2007

China on Tuesday said it does not support UN sanctions against Myanmar's ruling junta but favours continued mediation by a UN envoy.

"We believe that sanctions and pressure are not helpful to resolving the issues in Myanmar," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said.

"We believe that any actions adopted by the UN Security Council should be prudent and responsible, and conducive to the mediation work of the UN secretary-general," Liu told reporters.

Any action must also help the "stability, reconciliation, democratization and development" of Myanmar, he said.

China welcomed the "relaxation" of tension in Myanmar after the army crackdown on protestors and would not change its policy of economic engagement with the military government there, Liu said.

He praised the visit to Myanmar by UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari, who said last week he plans to return to South-East Asia in early November to continue his diplomatic efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar.

Liu repeated China's call for all parties in Myanmar to "exercise restraint."

The UN Security Council on Monday drafted a statement that would condemn Myanmar's military junta's "violent repression" of pro-democracy demonstrators and demand the release of political prisoners, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The draft was being considered by the council's legal experts, but there was no timeline as to when the statement would be adopted and issued. China and Russia viewed the turmoil in Myanmar as an internal matter and would oppose interference by the council.

The draft called for a full account of "those jailed, missing or killed during the demonstrations, asking the government to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet the detainees and investigate those reported missing.

PMLC threatens to call for Chinese Olympics boycott

Democratic Voice of Burma -

The People's Movement Leader Committee has threatened to call for a boycott of the 2008 Olympics if China uses its veto in the United Nations Security Council again to block action on Burma.

The group issued a statement which said that China's protection of the Burmese military government has enabled the junta to continue its suppression of demonstrations.

"If China continues acting in this way, we would like to warn them we will campaign to get all six billion people of the world to boycott the upcoming Beijing Olympics...and also all Chinese products," the statement said.

"[China] doesn't care if it sees millions of Burmese people sinking into poverty - in fact they are only interested in making profits for themselves by dealing with the Burmese government. We will do what we can to the best of our abilities. The Burmese people would not tolerate it this time if China uses its veto again," the statement continued.

Some political and human rights groups have already called for a boycott of the 2008 games in response to China's refusal to condemn the actions of the Burmese government in suppressing recent demonstrations.

Myanmar junta chief willing to meet Suu Kyi if she drops demands

AFP - 04 October 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's junta chief would be willing to meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi if she meets major preconditions including ending her support for sanctions on the regime, state media said Thursday.

Myanmar's Senior General Than Shwe made the offer to meet with the detained Nobel Peace Prize winner during his talks Tuesday with UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari, state television reported.

However, his offer was contingent on Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been held under house arrest for more than a decade, making a series of concessions that made any hope of talks appear a distant possibility.

"Senior General Than Shwe said during his meeting with Mr. Gambari that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been promoting four things -- confrontation, utter devastation, economic sanctions on Myanmar, and other sanctions," state television said.

"Then he passed his message that he would meet directly with her for dialogue if she announces that she has given up these four things," it added.

Myanmar junta tightens screws

Reuters - 04 October 2007

YANGON - Despite gradually easing its iron grip on Myanmar's main city on Thursday, the junta continued to round up scores of people and grill hundreds more arrested during and after a ruthless crackdown on pro-democracy marches.

A relative of three women released said detainees were being divided into four categories: passers-by, those who watched, those who clapped and those who joined in.

People in central Yangon's Kamayut district said soldiers had arrested scores of people on Wednesday night for trying to impede a raid on the Aung Nyay Tharzi monastery a few days earlier and giving protection to fleeing Buddhist monks.

Another 70 young monks rounded up in other swoops across the city a week ago were freed overnight from a government technical institute, complementing 80 monks and 149 women believed to be nuns released on Wednesday.

One freed monk, who did not want his name revealed, said some had been beaten when they refused to answer questions about their identity, birthplace, parents and involvement in the protests.

"The food and living conditions were horrible," the monk, from Yangon's Pyinya Yamika Maha (A) monastery told Reuters.

UN envoy reports on Myanmar; China opposes action

Reuters – 04 October 2007

UNITED NATIONS - The U.N. Security Council decided on Thursday to hear a U.N. envoy's report on Myanmar at a public meeting but China said it was opposed to any "international imposed solution," saying the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy campaigners was an internal affair.

Other speakers invited to address the council on Friday included Ban, a delegate from Myanmar, and one from Singapore, representing the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes Myanmar.

Beijing's U.N. Ambassador Wang Guangya told reporters, "There are problems there in Myanmar but these problems still, we believe, are basically internal."

"No international-imposed solution can help the situation," Wang said. "We want the government there to handle this issue."

Wang said China and its neighbors wanted to see the country "achieve stability, achieve democracy, achieve good governance, achieve a better way of life of its people."

He added: "The important thing is we have to express our concern in different ways to let the government down there understand that they have to handle the situation very carefully."

Wang said the best action the council could take was to support the efforts of Gambari, a U.N. undersecretary-general and former U.N. ambassador from Nigeria.

He said his preference had been to have a closed council meeting on Friday because Gambari could speak "more frankly." As a compromise, private consultations will follow the public meeting.

Journalist body returns from Myanmar as Japan prepares to cut aid

Associated Press - 04 October 2007

TOKYO: The body of a Japanese journalist killed during pro-democracy demonstrations in Yangon was returned home early Thursday as Japan's government was considering reducing its donations to Myanmar to protest his death.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura said Wednesday that Japan was preparing to suspend aid to Myanmar in response to the death of Kenji Nagai during last week's military crackdown on street protests in Yangon despite repeated international calls to end repression.

"There have been calls to freeze aid entirely, but ordinary people in that country are already suffering. So we've decided to narrow down humanitarian aid for now," Komura told a group of reporters.

Nagai's body was to be sent to a Tokyo hospital. Police planned to conduct an autopsy to determine the cause of his death, Foreign Ministry officials said.

Japanese officials have said Nagai was clearly shot at close range, not hit by stray bullets as Myanmar officials had earlier explained, and demanded the return of the journalist's video camera and tapes believed to have captured the shooting.

Japan, Myanmar's largest aid donor, has already limited its economic aid to Myanmar to humanitarian assistance, and is now "considering cutting it back further," Komura said.

Humanitarian assistance directly affecting the Myanmar public, including polio vaccination, should continue, but Japan is likely to freeze other projects such as human resource centers, he said.

U.S. diplomat: Burma's junta hunting protesters

October 3, Associated Press

Rangoon, Burma - Soldiers announced they were hunting pro-democracy protesters in Burma's largest city Wednesday and the top U.S. diplomat in the country said she heard that military police were pulling people out of their homes during the night.

Military vehicles patrolled the streets before dawn with loudspeakers blaring, "We have photographs. We are going to make arrests!"

Shari Villarosa, the acting U.S. ambassador in Burma, said in a telephone interview that people in Rangoon were terrified.

"From what we understand, military police ... are traveling around the city in the middle of the night, going into homes and picking up people," she said.

Villarosa said embassy staff had gone to some monasteries in recent days and found them completely empty. Others were barricaded by the military and declared off-limits to outsiders.

"There is a significantly reduced number of monks on the streets. Where are the monks? What has happened to them?" she said.

A semblance of normality returned to Rangoon after daybreak, with some shops opening and light traffic on roads.

However, "people are terrified, and the underlying forces of discontent have not been addressed," Villarosa said. "People have been unhappy for a long time ... Since the events of last week, there's now the unhappiness combined with anger, and fear."

Some people remained hopeful that democracy would come.

"I don't believe the protests have been totally crushed," said Kin, a 29-year-old language teacher in Rangoon, whose father and brother had joined a 1988 pro-democracy movement that ended in a crackdown in which at least 3,000 people were killed.

"There is hope, but we fear to hope," she said. "We still dream of rearing our children in a country where everybody would have equal chances at opportunities."

Myanmar's Minorities Face Persecution

Associated Press - 03 October 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - While international attention has focused on the protests for democracy in Myanmar's cities, a hidden war has decimated generations of the country's powerless ethnic minorities, who have faced brutality for decades.

The Karen, the Shan and other minority groups who live along the Myanmar-Thai border have been attacked, raped and killed by government soldiers. Their thatched-roofed, bamboo homes have been torched. Men have been seized into forced labor for the army, while women, children and the elderly either hide out in nearby jungles until the soldiers leave or flee over the mountains to crowded, makeshift refugee camps.

"Many, many thousands of Karen have died in those 60 years," Karen National Union secretary general Mahn Sha said this week of his people's struggle for autonomy since 1947.

The military junta has denied reports of atrocities and says the ethnic rebels are "terrorists" trying to overthrow the government.

More EU Sanctions Against Myanmar

Associated Press - 03 October 2007

NEW YORK - European Union nations agreed Wednesday to expand sanctions against Myanmar's military regime to protest the crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrators.

Portugal, which holds the EU presidency, said in a statement the 27-nation bloc would "toughen EU sanctions against the regime."

Diplomats said extra sanctions would include an expanded visa ban for members of the military junta, as well as expanded import bans on such products as timber and gemstones. The new measures would be given a final approval by EU foreign ministers in two weeks' time, diplomats said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks.

A panel of EU experts is to determine the specifics of the new measures before EU foreign ministers meet on Oct. 15 in Luxembourg. The panel will finalize a list of more people who will be added to an asset freeze and visa travel ban that the EU already has in place against the junta.

As part of new economic measures, the bloc said it would expand an investment ban and block more trade in metals, lumber and precious stones, like rubies, sapphires.

The new measures do not include a specific ban on European oil and gas companies from doing business in Myanmar, diplomats said.

However, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said on Tuesday that new sanctions France was drafting would not spare oil giant Total SA, which has operations in Myanmar.

Italian Premier Romano Prodi called for "stronger and more vigorous" action from the international community, saying that "the situation is calm on the surface, but underneath it is disastrous."

Prodi also said he wrote to the leaders of China and India to urge them to help solve the crisis.

The EU on Wednesday wanted to reinforce that point. "We passed very serious messages," said EU foreign affairs chief Javier Solana. "One with China and one with India, two countries that are fundamental when we are talking about Myanmar," he said.

UN envoy confers with ASEAN officials on Myanmar

UN News Centre - 03 October 2007

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari held talks today in Singapore with the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) after concluding a series of meetings with senior leaders in Myanmar.

While in Myanmar, the Special Envoy met with Senior General Than Shwe and other members of the senior leadership, as well as leading democracy advocate and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Today, he discussed developments in Myanmar with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Foreign Minister George Yeo of Singapore, both of whom expressed ASEAN's strong support for Mr. Gambari's mission, UN Spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters.

He is now on his way back to New York, where he will brief the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the President of the General Assembly upon his return, she added.

Ban to review action on Myanmar with U.N. council

Reuters - 03 October 2007

UNITED NATIONS - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will soon discuss new steps to address human rights violations in Myanmar, where the military government is cracking down on protesters, with Security Council members.

The secretary-general said on Wednesday he would meet his special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, on Thursday and they would report to the 15 council members in a private meeting on Friday.

"I am going to do whatever I can to, first of all, address this issue, the overall human rights situation in Myanmar," Ban told reporters. "That is one of the top concerns of the international community."

"We will discuss closely with the Security Council members (how) to take action in the future," he said.

Asked about Gambari's visit, Ban said, "You cannot call it a success." But, he added, "I was relatively relieved that he was first of all able to meet with leaders of the Myanmar government as well as Madame Aung San Suu Kyi".

Ban also pointed to a strong statement against Myanmar issued by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and said he met with ASEAN ministers as well as Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win during this week's General Assembly session.

"I again made it quite clear that it is the collective political responsibility of ASEAN, and I am going to take it as a high priority issue," Ban said.

The Security Council will meet in closed session despite a U.S. request for an open meeting due to Chinese objections, diplomats said.

UN Human Rights Council calls on Myanmar to release detainees, political prisoners

UN News Centre - 2 October 2007

The United Nations Human Rights Council, convened in special session, today strongly deplored the continued violent repression of peaceful demonstrations in Myanmar, calling on the authorities to release without delay all those recently arrested as well as all political detainees, including democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The adoption of the resolution by consensus came after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Envoy to Myanmar, Ibrahim Gambari, met with the South-East Asian nation's top general to discuss the "current situation," while UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour called on the Government to give a full account of those killed, injured and arrested in the anti-Government protests that began last month.

"The peaceful protests we have witnessed in recent weeks and the shocking response by the authorities are only the most recent manifestations of the repression of fundamental rights and freedoms that has taken place for nearly 20 years in Myanmar," Ms. Arbour told the 47-member Council in Geneva.

"The Myanmar authorities should no longer expect that their self-imposed isolation will shield them from accountability," she added. "As the protesters have become invisible, our concern only increases for the safety and well being of the monks, presumably confined to their monasteries, if not worse, and for the hundreds of people arrested in the course of the demonstrations, and for those wounded and removed from the streets to unknown locations."

She stressed that the 2005 Summit of World Leaders at UN Headquarters in New York agreed that the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians against serious international crimes.

"The exercise of such responsibility requires that preventive, reactive and rebuilding measures be put in place to avert and confront crises, as well as to prepare the ground for justice, the rule of law and respect for human rights to take hold," Ms. Arbour declared. "As we seek to prevent the outbreak of further overt violence and abuse, we must deploy all efforts to reach those clearly in need of international protection, including those whose fate is unknown."

Also addressing the session, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro called for decisive international action to prevent a repeat of the massacres that marked a pro-democracy uprising nearly two decades ago. "The failure of the international community to prevent the massacre following the 1988 people's uprising causing the death of over 3,000 protesters must not be repeated," he said. "The world is watching and while the time for mere words has passed, decisive action is now needed. No State can condone such actions."

He, too, called for the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and political prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung Sang Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years.

He decried the recent media black-out and cutting of internet access as "a further example of the intolerable and oppressive means used by the authorities," and urged the Council to seek detailed information from the Government on the number of those killed and injured. "Impunity should not prevail for flagrant violations of human rights," he said.

Mr. Pinheiro called for a strategic dialogue with the help of regional States to reconcile the army with the people of Myanmar.

"There will be no progress in Myanmar's political transition unless ordinary people have space to express their views and discontent, peacefully and in public. The starting point for a national reconciliation requires meaningful and inclusive dialogue from the Government with and between political representatives and ethnic groups," he concluded.

Myanmar junta arrests more people under the cover of darkness

Reuters - 02 October 2007

YANGON - Myanmar's junta arrested more people under the cover of darkness on Wednesday despite a crescendo of international outrage during a keenly watched U.N. mission to bring an end to a bloody crackdown on protests.

At least eight truckloads of prisoners were hauled out of downtown Yangon, the former Burma's biggest city and centre of monk-led protests against decades of military rule and deepening economic hardship, witnesses said.

In one house near the Shwedagon Pagoda, the holiest shrine in devoutly Buddhist Myanmar and starting point for last week's rallies, only a 13-year-old girl remained. Her parents had been taken in the middle of the night, she said.

There was no word on where the prisoners were being taken or how many they would join.

The crackdown continued despite faint signs of progress by U.N. envoy Ibrahim Gambari on his mission to persuade junta chief Than Shwe to relax his iron grip and open talks with detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whom he met twice.

U.N. sources said Gambari expected to return in early November to Myanmar.

UN envoy meets with Myanmar's top general to discuss 'current situation'

UN News Centre - 02 October 2007

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Envoy to Myanmar today met with the South-East Asian nation's top general on the last day of his mission in response to the deteriorating situation there amid reports of the use of force and of the arrest and beating of demonstrators.

The meeting with Senior General Than Shwe in Naypyitaw, the capital, "to discuss the current situation in Myanmar" lasted over one hour, a UN news release from Geneva said.

It came as the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva opened a special session on Myanmar amid denunciations of the "the brutal crack-down" by the authorities and calls for decisive international action to prevent a repeat of the massacres that marked a pro-democracy uprising nearly two decades ago.

Mr. Gambari, who also met with other members of the senior leadership, later returned to Yangon, the main city, where he met with leading democracy advocate and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for the second time. He has now left Myanmar to return to New York to report to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the outcome of his mission.

Global action needed to prevent massacres in Myanmar, UN Rights Council told

UN News Centre - 02 October 2007

The United Nations Human Rights Council opened a special session on Myanmar today amid denunciations of the "brutal crack-down" by the authorities and calls for decisive international action to prevent a repeat of the massacres that marked a pro-democracy uprising nearly two decades ago.

"The failure of the international community to prevent the massacre following the 1988 people's uprising causing the death of over 3,000 protesters must not be repeated," Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro told the session in Geneva.

"The world is watching and while the time for mere words has passed, decisive action is now needed. No State can condone such actions," he added, joining his voice to recent condemnations issued by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour.

Mr. Pinheiro called for the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and political prisoners, including the country's top democracy advocate, Nobel Peace Prize winner Daw Aung Sang Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 12 of the past 18 years.

"I am shocked and saddened by the growing number of reported deaths and serious injuries suffered by protesters, including monks, and bystanders in Yangon, Mandalay and other major cities in Myanmar," he said of the latest demonstrations that began last month.

"I strongly condemn the use of deadly force by the security forces and call upon the Government of Myanmar to desist from such brutal measures and to cooperate in the efforts launched by the international community designed to prevent the further deterioration of the human rights situation."

He decried the recent media black-out and cutting of internet access as "a further example of the intolerable and oppressive means used by the authorities," and urge the Council to seek detailed information on the number of people killed and injured from the Government. "Impunity should not prevail for flagrant violations of human rights," he added.

"The persecution of members of political parties in the opposition and human rights defenders shows that nowadays the road map for democracy and the laying down of principles for a new constitution by the National Convention faces many obstacles to bring a genuine transition," Mr. Pinheiro declared, calling for a strategic dialogue with the help of regional States to reconcile the army with the people of Myanmar.

"There will be no progress in Myanmar's political transition unless ordinary people have space to express their views and discontent, peacefully and in public. The starting point for a national reconciliation requires meaningful and inclusive dialogue from the Government with and between political representatives and ethnic groups," he concluded.

Australia Rejects Burma's Nominee for Ambassador

Associated Press - 02 October 2007

Australia has rejected Burma's nominee as ambassador to the country because he is a general in the Southeast Asian nation's military regime.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Tuesday he was taking the highly unusual step of refusing to accept another country's nominee as its top diplomat because of the junta's reputation for repression.

"Burma has a very brutal military regime and I refused to accept a general from that regime," Downer told reporters in his home town of Adelaide.

"We will not be accepting anybody from the military regime in Burma as a representative of Burma in Australia. That is completely unacceptable," he said.

Downer did not identify Burma's nominee. The Australian newspaper named him as Brig-Gen Thura Thet Oo Maung, who had served in Burma's Shan and Karen states where rebels have been fighting the government.

The general would have replaced Burma's current ambassador.

Downer said he had made the decision to reject the nominee "a couple of months ago," and the crackdown on anti-government protesters in recent weeks confirmed the junta's brutality.

He said the Australian government believed at least 30 people have been killed in the crackdown—not the 10 that the Burmese military claims—and about 1,400 arrested.

Myanmar's neighbours have little influence: Singapore FM

AFP - 02 October 2007

SINGAPORE — Myanmar's neighbours have little influence over internal developments there, Singapore's foreign minister said in remarks published Tuesday.

George Yeo's comments came in an interview with The Straits Times after the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) last week expressed their "revulsion" at Myanmar's deadly crackdown on anti-government protesters.

Singapore is the current chair of ASEAN.

Experts and diplomats said the unusually sharp words contrasted with the usual gentle diplomacy used towards the military-ruled regime.

"But we have very little leverage over the internal development there. What we have is moral influence as members of the ASEAN family," Yeo told The Straits Times.

"We can't do what the big powers can do in terms of trade embargo or freezing bank accounts."

US-based Human Rights Watch has called on companies doing business in Myanmar, to "ensure their operations do not contribute to or benefit from human rights abuses" in Myanmar.

"There's a strong opposition across the board in Asia to sanctions," Robert Templer, Asia director of the International Crisis Group of analysts, said earlier when talking about the importance of regional trade in propping up Myanmar's government.

EU says ASEAN free-trade talks not threatened by Myanmar crackdown

AFP - 02 October 2007

BRUSSELS — A crackdown on pro-democracy protestors in ASEAN member Myanmar does not threaten to derail talks between the Asian bloc and the EU over a new free-trade pact, a European Commission spokesman said Tuesday.

"The situation in Burma should not in any way contaminate the talks we are having with the other ASEAN members," Commission spokesman for trade issues Peter Power told AFP.

"It's quite clear that we will not conclude an agreement with Burma so long as the current regime remains in power," he added.

Power explained that because ASEAN countries did not have common import tariffs the EU would in effect have to negotiate individually with each country and therefore Myanmar could be left out of an agreement.

Belgium reopens Myanmar humanity crimes probe against oil giant Total

AFP - 02 September 2007

by Pascal Mallet

BRUSSELS - French oil giant Total on Tuesday faced a renewed Belgian probe into its alleged support of Myanmar's military regime as authorities reopened an investigation into the firm.

Belgium authorities are reopening a case brought by Myanmar refugees that Total was involved in crimes against humanity in their country, the refugees' lawyer said.

Four refugees accuse the company of having used forced labour provided by the military regime to build a gas pipeline, according to lawyer Alexis Deswaef.

Authorities are also to reopen an investigation into possible crimes against humanity targetting the regime, he said.

In a consortium with the Myanmar's national oil company and US group Unocal, now part of Chevron, Total built a pipeline in the 1990s to transport gas from fields in Myanmar to Thai power plants in neighbouring Thailand.

The four refugees accuse Total of having provided logistic and financial support in the 1990s to the military junta, which they hold responsible for forced labour, deportations murder, arbitrary executions and torture.

Total has also faced legal action in France against its labour practices in Myanmar, where it has operated since 1992.

But last year the group was cleared of charges in France that it relied on forced labour to build the 1.2-billion-dollar (848-billion-euro) gas pipeline after an out-of-court settlement with the alleged victims caused the prosecution's case to collapse.

Deswaef said that the refugees had "refused the fat compensation Total was ready to pay them as it already did with other victims in France and Myanmar in exchange for calling off their cases."

In Paris, Total declined to comment on the Belgian case other than by saying it had "taken note" that it had been reopened.

While the case is closed in France, it has continued to simmer in Belgium.

Stallone and crew saw Myanmar aftermath

Associated Press - 02 October 2007

LOS ANGELES - Sylvester Stallone says he and his "Rambo" sequel movie crew recently witnessed the human toll of unspeakable atrocities while filming along the Myanmar border.

"I witnessed the aftermath — survivors with legs cut off and all kinds of land-mine injuries, maggot-infested wounds and ears cut off," Stallone told The Associated Press in a phone interview Monday. "We hear about Vietnam and Cambodia and this was more horrific."

Stallone said he was in Thailand for six months, most of it along or on the river.

"This is a hellhole beyond your wildest dreams," Stallone said. "All the trails are mined. The only way into Burma is up the river."

For decades, Myanmar's army has waged a brutal war against ethnic groups in which soldiers have razed villages, raped women and killed innocent civilians.

"I called Soldier of Fortune magazine and they said Burma was the foremost area of human abuse on the planet," Stallone said.

Groups Struggle to Tally Myanmar's Dead

Associated Press - 1 October 2007

BANGKOK, Thailand - One hundred shot dead outside a Myanmar school. Activists burned alive at government crematoriums. Buddhist monks floating face down in rivers.

After last week's brutal crackdown by the military, horror stories are filling Myanmar blogs and dissident sites. But the tight security of the repressive regime makes it impossible to verify just how many people are dead, detained or missing.

"There are huge difficulties. It's a closed police state," said David Mathieson, a consultant with Human Rights Watch in Thailand. "Many of the witnesses have been arrested and are being held in areas we don't have access to. Other eyewitnesses are too afraid."

Authorities have acknowledged that government troops shot dead nine demonstrators and a Japanese cameraman in Yangon. But witness accounts range from several dozen deaths to as many as 200.

"We do believe the death toll is higher than acknowledged by the government," Shari Villarosa, the top U.S. diplomat in Myanmar, told The Associated Press Monday. "We are doing our best to get more precise, more detailed information, not only in terms of deaths but also arrests."

Villarosa said her staff had visited up to 15 monasteries around Yangon and every single one was empty. She put the number of arrested demonstrators - monks and civilians - in the thousands.

"I know the monks are not in their monasteries," she said. "Where are they? How many are dead? How many are arrested?"

She said the true death toll may never be known in a Buddhist country where bodies are cremated.

"We're not going to find graves like they did in Yugoslavia ... We have seen few dead bodies. The bodies are removed promptly. We don't know where they are being taken," Villarosa said.

Myanmar's junta stalls U.N. envoy again

Associated Press - 01 October 2007

YANGON, Myanmar - Myanmar's junta leader kept up his usual tactics for foreign critics Monday, packing a U.N. envoy off to a remote academic conference and stalling for another day the chance to deliver international demands for an end to the crackdown on democracy advocates.

Ibrahim Gambari, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's special envoy to Myanmar, has been in the country since Saturday with the express purpose of seeing Senior Gen. Than Shwe about the violence, but the junta's top man hasn't made himself available.

Than Shwe does not bother with the usual diplomatic protocol and is not an easy man to meet with. In previous sparring with the United Nations and other international bodies over human rights abuses, the regime has repeatedly snubbed envoys and ignored diplomatic overtures.

Instead of the meeting Gambari sought Monday, he was sent to a remote northern town for an academic conference on relations between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, diplomats reported, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The town of Lashio, where the conference was held, is 240 miles north of Naypyitaw, the secure, isolated city carved out of the jungle where Than Shwe moved the capital in 2005.

Gambari was granted an appointment Tuesday to meet with Than Shwe in Naypyitaw, U.N. officials in New York said.

Myanmar violence blamed on 'opportunists' backed by 'powerful countries'

AFP – 01 October 2007

UNITED NATIONS - Myanmar Foreign Minister U Nyan Win on Monday blamed the military crackdown against anti-government protesters in his country on "political opportunists" backed by "some powerful countries".

"The situation would not have deteriorated had the initial protest of a small group of activists against the rise in fuel prices not been exploited by political opportunists," he told the UN General Assembly here.

He said those "opportunists ... aided and abetted by some powerful countries" also took advantage of protests "staged initially by a small group of Buddhist clergy demanding apology for maltreatment of fellow monks by local authorities."

The minister asserted that Myanmar security forces showed "utmost restraint" and did not intervene for nearly a month.

He said authorities were then compelled to declare a curfew "when the mob became unruly and provocative."

"When protestors ignored their warning, they (security forces) had to take action to restore the situation. Normalcy has now returned in Myanmar," he added.

Nyan Win portrayed the turmoil as part of "neo-colonialist attempts" to impose Western-style democracy on Myanmar.

Burma: Thousands dead in massacre of the monks dumped in the jungle

Daily Mail - 1st October 2007

By MARCUS OSCARSSON

Thousands of protesters are dead and the bodies of hundreds of executed monks have been dumped in the jungle, a former intelligence officer for Burma's ruling junta has revealed.

The most senior official to defect so far, Hla Win, said: "Many more people have been killed in recent days than you've heard about. The bodies can be counted in several thousand."

Mr Win, said he fled when he was ordered to take part in a massacre of holy men. He has now reached the border with Thailand.

Word reaching dissidents hiding out on the border suggested that as well as executions, some 2,000 monks are being held in the notorious Insein Prison or in university rooms which have been turned into cells.

There were reports that many were savagely beaten at a sports ground on the outskirts of Rangoon, where they were heard crying for help.

Others who had failed to escape disguised as civilians were locked in their bloodstained temples.

In stark contrast, the streets of Rangoon and Mandalay - centres of the attempted saffron revolution last week - were virtually deserted.

A Swedish diplomat who visited Burma during the protests said last night that in her opinion the revolution has failed.

Liselotte Agerlid, who is now in Thailand, said that the Burmese people now face possibly decades of repression. "The Burma revolt is over," she added.

"The military regime won and a new generation has been violently repressed and violently denied democracy. The people in the street were young people, monks and civilians who were not participating during the 1988 revolt.

"Now the military has cracked down the revolt, and the result may very well be that the regime will enjoy another 20 years of silence, ruling by fear."

Mrs Agerlid said Rangoon is heavily guarded by soldiers.

"There are extremely high numbers of soldiers in Rangoon's streets," she added.

"Anyone can see it is absolutely impossible for any demonstration to gather, or for anyone to do anything.

"People are scared and the general assessment is that the fight is over. We were informed from one of the largest embassies in Burma that 40 monks in the Insein prison were beaten to death today and subsequently burned."

The diplomat also said that three monasteries were raided yesterday afternoon and are now totally abandoned.

At his border hideout last night, 42-year-old Mr Win said he hopes to cross into Thailand and seek asylum.

The 42-year-old chief of military intelligence in Rangoon's northern region, added: "I decided to desert when I was ordered to raid two monasteries and force several hundred monks onto trucks.

"They were to be killed and their bodies dumped deep inside the jungle. I refused to participate in this."

With his teenage son, he made his escape from Rangoon, leaving behind his wife and two other sons.

Nothing Else to Give but Our Lives

Irrawaddy - 01 October 2007

"One of them stopped breathing while I was holding him in my arms. I was so sad that I just went home. The young men that were killed were all good people. Yet I am sure more people will have to die. Everyone is so depressed and all we can do is give up our lives."

This is the experience of a young man who took part in the demonstration in front of Ngwe Kyar Yan Monastery on September 27 after soldiers had conducted a midnight raid on the monastery and arrested more than 250 monks.

The young man lost four of his friends during the demonstration.

He says that he arrived at the demonstration at about noon and saw many other young men, aged about 20.

Riot police were standing in front of the soldiers and blocking the demonstrators' way. The protesters threw stones at the riot police but they still blocked their path. The soldiers standing behind the riot police shot into the air to disperse the crowd," he recounted.

The young demonstrator said that the crowd retreated after those first shots, but gathered together again and marched toward the security forces.

He confirmed that the riot police moved away, leaving space for the soldiers. A burst of gunfire suddenly rang out. There was panic as the crowd fled.

Four young students who had been marching in the middle of the front row fell. They were dead. The demonstrators managed to carry three of the bodies away but the SPDC troops claimed the fourth body.

"We are paying the ultimate price," said the young man who tried to save his friend.

Many people have given their lives or lost family members during the last four decades of Burmese military rule. Countless times the people of Burma have pleaded with the international community to help solve the country's political woes.

The common reply is that it is an internal affair and that it's the duty of the Burmese people themselves to find a resolution. They say the UN cannot do anything.

Now, once again, the good people of Burma are crying for freedom. Several hundred have been arrested; monks have been defrocked, beaten and jailed. It is still not known how many people are missing or have been killed by the government troops and their supporters.

Dissident groups say at least 200 people have died.

"We don't know what to do now," the young demonstrator said. "If we carry on, they will kill all of us," he said sadly.

"What else do we have to give until the international community and the UN come to Burma's aid?"

Internet link remains shut amid Myanmar's crackdown

Agence France-Presse - 30 September 2007

YANGON--Myanmar's main Internet link remained shut for a third straight day Sunday, as the ruling regime tried to curb the flow of information on a bloody crackdown against protesters.

"I tried this morning again but it's failed again. I haven't been able to check my e-mail since Friday," said one Yangon resident.

Internet cafés in Yangon also remained closed. Over the past week, tech-savvy citizens used the cybercafés to transmit pictures and video clips of the regime's clampdown taken on mobile phones and digital cameras.

Paris-based media rights group Reporters Without Borders said that by cutting Internet access, the regime was trying to operate "behind closed doors."

PM Lee expresses deep concerns over Myanmar

Channel News - 01 October 2007

SINGAPORE : Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has expressed his deep concerns he and other ASEAN leaders share over the very grave situation in Myanmar.

In a letter addressed to Senior General Than Shwe of Myanmar, Mr Lee said he had discussed the matter with all the other ASEAN leaders.

The letter was written in Singapore's capacity as the ASEAN Chair.

Mr Lee said: "We are most disturbed by reports of the violent means that the authorities in Myanmar have deployed against the demonstrators, which have resulted in injuries and deaths.

"The videos and photographs of what is happening on the streets of Yangon and other cities in Myanmar have evoked the revulsion of people throughout Southeast Asia and all over the world."

Mr Lee said ASEAN agreed that the confrontation that is unfolding in Myanmar would have serious implications not just for Myanmar itself, but also for ASEAN and the whole region.

Hence, he said ASEAN's Foreign Ministers issued a firm statement in New York, strongly urging Myanmar to exercise utmost restraint, and to work towards a political solution for national reconciliation and a peaceful transition to democracy.

Mr Lee said ASEAN also called for the release of all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

He said ASEAN leaders fully supported the mission by Mr Ibrahim Gambari, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General.

Mr Gambari is in Myanmar to help all parties involved find a peaceful resolution.

Mr Lee said he would like to emphasise the importance which the ASEAN countries, and indeed the whole international community, attach to Mr Gambari's mission.

He strongly urged Myanmar authorities to grant Mr Gambari full access to all parties in Myanmar, as they had done in the past, and to work with Mr Gambari to try to find a way forward.

Mr Lee added: "ASEAN's concerns are for the welfare of the people of Myanmar, for a return to stability and normalcy, and for Myanmar to take its place among the comity of nations. I hope you will consider these views in that spirit."

Pope expresses hope for peaceful solution in Myanmar

Associated Press - 30 September 2007

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy: Pope Benedict XVI expressed serious concern Sunday about the situation in Myanmar and said he strongly hoped that a peaceful solution would be found.

"I am following with great trepidation the very serious events" in the Asian nation, whose military regime has violently cracked down on peaceful pro-democracy protests. It was his first public comments on the developments this month in Myanmar.

"I want to express my spiritual closeness to the dear population in this moment of the very painful trial it is going through," the pontiff said during an appearance to pilgrims at his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo in the hills southeast of Rome.

While assuring the people of his "intense prayer" and inviting "the entire Church" to also pray, Benedict said he "strongly hoped that a peaceful solution can be found, for the good of the country."

U.N. envoy fails to meet Myanmar leader

Associated Press - 30 September 2007

YANGON, Myanmar - Ibrahim Gambari, met Sunday with the acting prime minister, the deputy foreign minister and the ministers of information and culture, but the diplomat failed to meet with the junta's commander.

The list did not include either junta leader Senior Gen. Than Shwe or his deputy Maung Aye, the two men who have the final say in all key decisions in the country.

"We want Mr. Gambari to stay here long enough to get under way a genuine process of national reconciliation," Britain's ambassador Mark Canning said. "He should be given as much time as that takes. That will require access to senior levels of government as well as a range of political actors."

But it was not clear how much influence the junta will allow Gambari to exert.

On Sunday, the number of troops in Yangon, the largest city, swelled to about 20,000 after reinforcements arrived overnight, ensuring that almost all demonstrators would remain off the streets, an Asian diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

"The security forces are demonstrating their strength," he said. "I think the chance of protesters coming to the road and mobilizing enough people to topple the junta is zero."

People suspected of leading or organizing this week's rallies continue to be arrested, the Asian diplomat said, estimating the total number could be as high as 1,000, including several prominent members of the NLD. They joined an estimated 1,100 other political detainees who have languished in jails since before the current turmoil began.

With the main prison overcrowded, people are now being detained in university buildings and educational institutes, he said.

UN envoy meets Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi

AFP - 30 September 2007

YANGON - Ibrahim Gambari met with Aung San Suu Kyi for more than an hour, took place at a government guest house in the main city of Yangon, the UN said in a statement.

The UN said the Nigerian-born envoy has not yet seen junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe but "looks forward" to meeting him before departing from Myanmar. It did not say when he would leave.

It said Gambari "conveyed a message" from the UN chief in talks with Acting Prime Minister Lieutenant-General Thein Sein and Minister for Information Brigadier General Kyaw Hsan.

Gambari's predecessor as UN envoy to Myanmar, the veteran Malaysian diplomat Razali Ismail, said he must come away from Yangon with a real result.

The envoy "must get a promise from the military that they will not shoot the people who express their views. We cannot let the people down," he told AFP.

"The people should be allowed to march on the streets and protest," Razali said. "The economic policies of the junta are wrong. It has not benefited the people."

Japan envoy heads for Myanmar over newsman's death

Reuters - 30 September 2007

TOKYO - A Japanese envoy flew to Myanmar on Sunday to urge the military junta to thoroughly investigate the killing of a Japanese journalist during an anti-government rally and not to use force to end mass protests.

Video journalist Kenji Nagai, 50, was fatally wounded in Yangon on Thursday, apparently shot by a soldier firing at point-blank range.

"One (purpose of the visit) is to make sure there is a full investigation into the dreadful incident and to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals," Deputy Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka told reporters at Narita airport on his way to Myanmar.

"The other is to deliver to them the voice of the international community, which hopes for the use of dialogue, not force, in handling pro-democracy movements," Yabunaka said.

Tokyo is considering recalling its ambassador and reducing or suspending technical assistance to Myanmar, and it will decide on how to proceed after seeing how the military junta reacts to Yabunaka's requests, Kyodo news agency said.

**Human Rights Council to Hold Special Session on Situation
in Myanmar on 2 October**

United Nations Office at Geneva
Media Release
28 September 2007

The Human Rights Council will hold a Special Session on the situation of human rights in Myanmar on Tuesday, 2 October after receiving a request signed by 17 Member States. Doru Romulus Costea, the President of the Council, said that he will hold open-ended informative consultations on Monday, 1 October on the conduct and organization of the Special Session, which will be held on Tuesday, 2 October.

This will be the fifth Special Session convened by the Human Rights Council since it was created in June 2006. At previous Special Sessions the Council has considered the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the grave situation of human rights in Lebanon caused by Israeli military operations; human rights violations emanating from Israeli military incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the recent one in northern Gaza and the assault on Beit Hanoun, and the situation in Darfur, Sudan.

General Assembly Resolution 60/251 which created the Human Rights Council states in its operative paragraph 10 that the Council "shall be able to hold Special Sessions when needed at the request of a member of the Council with the support of one-third of the membership of the Council".