

## Suu Kyi in good health, but needs more medical visits: UN

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health but needs more regular medical visits, top UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari said yesterday after meeting the detained democracy leader in Yangon.

"She is reasonably well considering that she has been in detention for 10 of the last 17 years or so," Gambari told reporters at Bangkok's international airport following his four-day visit to military-run Myanmar.

"But, of course, she needs to be allowed to see her doctor much more regularly," said the UN envoy, who held talks with the 61-year-old Nobel peace laureate Saturday in Yangon in a rare meeting granted by the ruling junta.

During their one-hour meeting, Aung San Suu Kyi told him that she was in good health but wanted to receive more medical care, said a statement from the United Nations, which also released recent photographs of her, the first in three years.

Wearing a traditional purple silk "longyi" dress with flower prints, the pro-democracy leader looked drawn and gave a modest smile as she posed for pictures with Gambari.

She had a gynaecological operation in 2003 and fell ill in June with stomach troubles. On that occasion, her doctor was allowed to treat her in her home.

Apart from her live-in maid, Aung San Suu Kyi is allowed no contact

with the outside world, except for once-a-month visits from her doctor, Tin Myo Win.

But the doctor has not seen her since August, according to a spokesman for her opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

Myanmar's police had said the doctor would likely see her this weekend for a general medical checkup and an ultrasound examination, but NLD spokesman Lwin, who uses one name, said the doctor's visit would come after Gambari's.

Despite years of detention, Gambari said Aung San Suu Kyi was "very alert". "She is concerned not only just about her own welfare but the welfare of the people of Myanmar," he added.

The opposition leader was also concerned about "the contribution that her party, the NLD and others can make to peace, development, democracy and the development of human rights in the country," he said.

The Nigerian diplomat became the only foreigner allowed to see Aung San Suu Kyi in more than two years when he saw her during his previous visit to Myanmar in May.

She has been under house arrest in Yangon for most of the past 17 years, and Saturday's meeting allowed the detained opposition leader to leave her lakeside house for the first time since their previous meeting on May 20.



Top UN official Ibrahim Gambari (R) poses with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (L) during discussions in Yangon on Saturday. Gambari, on a mission to press military-run Myanmar for democratic reform, met with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi Saturday for the second time this year.

PHOTO: AFP

## Little expectation as Indo-Pak talks resume tomorrow

### Indian army against withdrawal from glacier

REUTERS, AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan aim to revive their peace process through a new joint anti-terrorism mechanism this week, but they will do well to avoid another round of mud-slinging, analysts say.

Tuesday and Wednesday's talks between top foreign ministry officials are the first in 10 months, and follow a series of bomb attacks in Mumbai in July that killed 186 people and sent a shockwave through the peace process.

Although trust is still in short supply, at least the two sides are talking rather than rattling sabres, analysts say.

"The very fact that talks have resumed is something in itself, that is important," said Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, a former Indian envoy to Pakistan. "But I wouldn't place any great expectations on the talks themselves." India controversially blamed July's attack on Pakistan's military intelligence, and has promised to present evidence to back up that claim at this week's talks.

But it also wants to work with its rival to set up a new mechanism to fight extremism.

"I personally don't place much faith on that," added Parthasarathy. "It's a question of political will not mechanisms."

India's army has warned against pulling out troops from Kashmir's disputed Siachen glacier, ahead of talks between New Delhi and Islamabad, which are expected to focus on the issue.

Ahead of the talks, the Indian army repeated its stance that Siachen, the world's highest battlefield, was strategically important for the country and troops should remain in place.

"If we vacate the posts on Siachen Glacier-Saltoro Ridge and Pakistanis and Chinese come to control the valley, it can threaten eastern Ladakh," Brigadier Om Prakash of the Siachen Brigade told

the Times of India, referring to the region bordering China.

Demilitarisation of the 6,300-metre (20,700-foot) glacier -- proposed this year by Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf -- is expected to figure in talks between India's Shivshankar Menon and Pakistan's Riaz Mohammad Khan.

The peace process was launched in 2004 amid a surge of optimism, with India's then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee appearing to share an unlikely chemistry with Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

But Vajpayee was booted out of office in elections shortly after-

wards, and it wasn't long before the momentum dissipated.

"At the moment, the peace process is in something of a stalemate," said retired Pakistani general and political analyst Talat Masood. "It surely needs another injection of life."

Vajpayee's successor, the soft-spoken Manmohan Singh, appears to have less control over his coalition government and over India's traditionally hawkish establishment.

"The feeling I get is that the prime minister is very keen to move forward on this but he doesn't know how to go about it," said a former chief of Indian intelligence.

## Nepal govt, rebels to sign truce accord

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's multi-party government and Maoist rebels will sign a permanent ceasefire deal as part of a comprehensive peace accord on Thursday, the chief of the state's peace committee said yesterday.

Peace hopes have grown in the Himalayan nation since the two sides signed a temporary truce in April after King Gyanendra relinquished power following mass street protests.

The government and rebels also signed a power-sharing pact last week in which the Maoists will place their weapons under UN supervision and join an interim administration by Dec 1.

Both sides are under intense public pressure to turn the present lull in violence into lasting peace, ending a decade-long insurgency that toppled the monarchy. The conflict has killed more than 13,000 people.

"The ceasefire agreement will be part of a comprehensive national peace accord due to be signed by Prime Minister (Girija Prasad Koirala) and (Maoist chief) Prachanda on Thursday," Ram Chandra Poudel, coordinator of the state's peace committee, which liaises and handles the peace process, told Reuters.

"It will turn the present situation of temporary truce into a permanent ceasefire," he said.

He said the accord would also include a human rights agreement, and spell out modalities and details of arms monitoring.

On Saturday, the United Nations urged the government and Maoists to start focusing on protecting human rights following last week's power-sharing agreement.

Poudel said extortion, kidnapping and intimidation that were ignored by authorities so far would not be spared.

Political parties and human rights groups have accused the Maoists of extorting money and kidnapping people, despite the truce.

The rebels say they are only collecting voluntary donations.

## Grim prospect for Lankan peace as violence spirals

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka faces the grim prospect of more tit-for-tat violence between security forces and Tamil rebels despite foreign pressure to avert full-scale war, diplomats and analysts say.

Aid donors severely criticised Sri Lanka's government over the killing of a large number of Tamil refugees last week and urged the warring parties to honour their pledges to uphold a truce.

However, two days later a moderate Tamil legislator who had asked the United Nations to intervene to save civilians caught in the

crossfire was assassinated on the streets of Colombo.

The massacre of up to 65 civilians and the slaying of Tamil politician Nadarajah Raviraj shocked Sri Lanka's key international backers -- the US, European Union, Japan and Norway -- who are already running out of patience.

"The killing of an MP on the streets in broad daylight shows that we are moving towards anarchy," said retired brigadier-general Vipul Boteju. "Silencing a moderate voice can only strengthen hard-liners."

He said the country was fast becoming a "basket case" with little space for moderates to push for a

negotiated solution to a conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

Germany has already cut back aid because of the lack of progress in the Norwegian-backed peace process, according to media reports, but diplomats close to the peace initiative said an aid freeze was not practical.

A top diplomat said travel restrictions slapped on Tamil Tiger guerrillas in the European Union and the United States could be extended to selected individuals of the administration as a pressure tactic.

## Assam rebels blow up gas pipeline

AFP, Guwahati

A bomb planted by suspected rebels destroyed a stretch of a natural gas pipeline in India's restive and resource-rich northeast Assam state, police said yesterday.

There were no casualties from the explosion overnight in the Dibrugarh district about 470km east of the state's main city of Guwahati.

"Militants of the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) triggered a powerful blast on Saturday at a pipeline transporting natural gas in Dibrugarh," a police spokesman said.

"The blast caused extensive damage and there was a very big fire soon after the explosion," a spokesman of the state-owned Assam Gas Company told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The explosion is the latest in a string of rebel attacks following the collapse of a ceasefire with the government in September and the start of a major anti-insurgency offensive by police and troops.

## Uttar Pradesh says tigers getting run over by trains

REUTERS, Lucknow

At least four endangered tigers have been run over by trains in a reserve in north India in the past three years, local officials said, renewing calls to railway authorities to find an alternate route.

The Dudhwa National Park has 77 tigers, according to a 2005 census, but these animals were increasingly at threat from the trains that travel through the sanctuary, wildlife officials said.

"Four tigers were killed over the past three years after being run over by trains", Mohammad Ehsan, chief wildlife conservator of Uttar Pradesh where the sanctuary is located, said.

India has half the world's surviving tigers, but conservationists say the country is losing the battle to save the big cats.

Decades of poaching have cut the number of tigers to 3,700 from 40,000 tigers a century ago. Some activists say their number could be as low as 1,200.