

Myanmar offers amnesty for some political prisoners

UN demands release of Suu Kyi

AFP, United Nations

Myanmar on Monday offered an amnesty for some political prisoners after UN chief Ban Ki-moon demanded the release of key political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to ensure "credible and legitimate" polls next year.

Myanmar's UN ambassador Than Swe said his government was preparing an amnesty for political prisoners on humanitarian grounds so they can contest next year's general elections.

"At the request of the (UN) Secretary General, the Myanmar government is processing to grant amnesty to prisoners on humanitarian grounds and with a view to enabling them to participate in the 2010 general elections," he told the Security Council. He gave no further details.

Ban welcomed the statement, telling reporters: "This is encouraging but I have to continue to follow up how they will implement all the issues raised during my visit to Myanmar."

He said that he was "not quite sure who will be included in the amnesty," but added, "I have made it quite clear that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi should be released and free to participate in the elections."

Earlier Ban briefed the 15-member UN Security Council on his visit to military-ruled Myanmar early this month.

"The (Myanmar) government needs to deliver on the promise to make the 2010 elections inclusive, free and fair and to take the necessary steps on my specific proposals in the very near future," the UN boss said.

He made it clear that for the poll to be viewed as fair, political prisoners, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other detained members of her National League for Democracy (NLD), must be released and allowed to campaign freely.

"The choice for Myanmar's leaders in the coming days and weeks will be between meeting that responsibility in the interest of all concerned, or failing their

own people and each one of you," he said. "The world is now watching closely whether they will choose to act in the best interest of their country or ignore our concerns and expectations and the needs of their people."

In a conciliatory rejoinder, envoy Than Swe said his government "intends to implement all appropriate recommendations that the secretary general had proposed."

Earlier in his address to the council, Ban described the junta's refusal to allow him to meet with jailed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as "a deep disappointment but also a major lost opportunity for Myanmar."

The democracy activist, who faces an internationally condemned trial for violating the terms of her house arrest, has been either jailed or under house arrest for 13 of the last 19 years since the junta refused to recognise her National League for Democracy's victory in Myanmar's last elections, in 1990.



PHOTO: AFP

Foreign affairs ministers and their delegations leave a preparatory session, prior to the 15th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh on Monday. Developing world leaders head to Egypt for the NAM summit that is set to be overshadowed by talks between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

France honours India in Bastille Day parade

AFP, Paris

A proud detachment of Indian troops yesterday led thousands of French comrades down the Champs Elysees in Paris for the annual military parade to mark the Bastille Day national holiday.

The 400 soldiers filed down the elegant avenue under the eyes of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, invited by President Nicolas Sarkozy to mark France's strategic relationship with the world's biggest democracy.

Dressed in ceremonial uniforms of red and black headdress, cummerbunds and white puttees and gloves, the Indians marched from the Arc de Triomphe to the presidential stand at the end of the 1.5-kilometre (one mile) parade.

Drawn from the army, navy and the air force, the contingent paraded to the sound of Indian martial music played by a 90-member band in a ceremony shown live by all Indian television news channels.

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Singh and Sarkozy were joined in the presidential stand by the French president's pop star wife Carla Bruni, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, German President Horst Koehler and other dignitaries.

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