

## **China pledges to support UN special envoy on Myanmar**

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BEIJING: China supports the efforts of the United Nations to help bring reconciliation to Myanmar, the Foreign Ministry said Thursday, ahead of a visit by the U.N. special envoy.

Ibrahim Gambari's visit to China, which does considerable trade with Myanmar, comes after Myanmar's main opposition party staged a street protest this week to complain that the ruling junta's recent moves toward democracy were not enough.

The junta last week announced plans for a referendum this May on a proposed new constitution, to be followed by a general election in 2010. The plans were made without consulting the country's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, and its detained leader, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

"China is going to support the mediation efforts of Gambari and the secretary general of the United Nations," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Jianchao said at a news conference Thursday.

"We have taken note that the Myanmar government has taken steps toward the right direction. We hope that Myanmar can continue to proceed to promote democracy so as to achieve democratic reconciliation in Myanmar," he said.

Gambari is scheduled to visit Beijing on Monday and Tuesday, before flying to Jakarta and Singapore, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

China objects to Western criticisms of the Myanmar's military regime, saying that conditions in the country have improved dramatically since a violent crackdown on peaceful protests in September.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has been under military rule since 1962 and has not had a constitution since 1988, when the army brutally suppressed pro-democracy protests and the current junta took power.

On Monday, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the junta to hold substantive talks with Suu Kyi without delay to ensure that the constitution represents all citizens.

He also urged the government to grant a visa to Gambari to allow him to visit Myanmar again soon. Gambari has made two visits to promote reconciliation after last year's crackdown on protesters.

Ban has made it clear the United Nations is highly critical of the constitution-drafting process.

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