

China says no to pressure on Myanmar

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press Writer Tue Jan 22, 4:57 AM ET

BEIJING - China on Tuesday rejected U.S. demands for stepped-up pressure on Myanmar, whose governing junta has been accused of spurning real dialogue with the pro-democracy opposition.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said China wanted to see stability, democracy and development in the country also known as Burma.

However, Jiang urged the international community to be "objective when viewing the Myanmar situation ... and provide constructive assistance."

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

"I don't think sanctions are helpful," Jiang told reporters at a regularly scheduled news conference.

Myanmar's military rulers say 10 people were killed when civilians and Buddhist monks were beaten and arrested after pro-democracy demonstrations following a sharp fuel price hike. Diplomats and dissidents put the toll much higher.

Jiang's comments come a day after a senior U.S. official urged the international community to put more pressure on the junta, and said Washington had asked China to help arrange for a new visit to Myanmar by U.N. Security Council envoy Ibrahim Gambari to help push for national reconciliation.

They also follow a meeting in Beijing between senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Tang Jiaxuan and Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint.

China's official Xinhua News Agency said U Maung Myint told Tang that Myanmar was "making efforts to realize national reconciliation and accelerate democratic progress."

Jiang said China supported Gambari's work and wanted a timetable set for his next visit to Myanmar. Gambari had wanted to visit later this month, but received a letter from Myanmar's government requesting that he come in April.

China is one of Myanmar's biggest trading partners and closest diplomatic allies. Other nations have repeatedly expressed hopes Beijing would leverage those ties to press the junta to open a dialogue with the opposition.

Beijing has shown little willingness to do so, although in October, China joined other Security Council members in calling on the regime to release political prisoners and improve human rights.

Washington has placed economic sanctions on Myanmar that include a complete ban on the import of the country's products and the freezing of some junta officials' financial assets in U.S. territories.

China, however, has moved to step up economic links, including development of natural gas deposits in the Bay of Bengal.

Last month, China National Petroleum Corp., the country's biggest oil and gas producer, took a further step toward building a pipeline to transport oil from Myanmar's western port of Sittwe to the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan.

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