

# UN chief should visit Myanmar to push for diplomacy: think tank

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*The report urged Mr Ban to become 'directly involved in key negotiations with the Myanmar authorities. -- PHOTO: AFP*

BANGKOK - UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon should pay a personal visit to Myanmar to jumpstart a coordinated diplomatic effort to push the ruling junta to reform, a leading think tank said on Thursday.

That effort should include more sanctions targeted at junta leaders, including a universal arms embargo on Myanmar, but also economic incentives to encourage the military to loosen its controls, the International Crisis Group (ICG) said in a report.

The military's deadly crackdown on pro-democracy protests in September 'has shaken up the political status quo,' the report said.

'The international community has been mobilised to an unprecedented extent, and there are indications that divergences of view have grown within the military,' it added.

The report urged Mr Ban to become 'directly involved in key negotiations with the Myanmar authorities, including through a personal visit to (the capital) Naypyidaw in the near future.' Buddhist monks led mass protests against the regime in September in the biggest challenge to military rule in nearly two decades.

The military opened fire on the crowds to break up the demonstrations. The United Nations estimates that at least 31 were killed and 74 remain missing.

The UN chief has appointed a special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, to lead efforts at opening a dialogue between the military and the pro-democracy opposition led by detained Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Dr Gambari has paid two visits to the country, but when he asked to return

this month, the military put him off until April.

The ICG said that Dr Gambari should continue to lead the international diplomatic effort, bolstered by a visit by Mr Ban to the remote capital of Naypyidaw.

Neighbouring countries, including China, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, should support his efforts by engaging directly with the generals on issues of regional stability and development, the report said.

Western countries should also help by keeping the spotlight on human rights issues, boosting humanitarian aid, and imposing sanctions on the regime leaders while offering incentives to reform.

Among the sanctions would be refusing access to overseas schools and hospitals for the junta and their family members, blocking access to banking services, and a universal arms embargo, it said.

The military has made some efforts at starting a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, naming a liaison officer to hold talks with her.

But during a rare meeting with her party's leadership on Wednesday, she said that she was not satisfied with the talks, which have produced few results after three months, according to a spokesman. -- AFP

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