

Russia upbeat about Myanmar junta-opposition dialogue

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MOSCOW, October 26 (RIA Novosti) - Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Friday the country praised the start of direct dialogue between Myanmar's government and the opposition.

Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi held talks with a government representative on Thursday as part of UN-sponsored attempts seeking the reconciliation of the opposition with the country's ruling junta.

"We hail the start of direct dialogue between the government of the Union of Myanmar, represented by Labor Minister Aung Kyi, and the leader of the opposition party National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi," the ministry's information and press department said.

The Union of Myanmar is the southeast Asian country's official name, adopted in 1989.

Russia expects the contact between the opposition and the ruling junta to become a significant factor in the achievement of national reconciliation and the advancement of democracy in the country, the ministry added.

Recent protests in Myanmar, which were the largest in more than two decades, began on August 19 when the junta drastically raised the price of fuel, leaving many people unable to afford even a journey to work.

Demonstrations rapidly took on a more general anti-junta nature however.

The vast majority of demonstrations that followed, including a 100,000-strong protest march in the capital, Yangon, were headed and organized by the country's monks. Protests eventually died down after soldiers raided monasteries throughout the country, beating and imprisoning large numbers of the Buddhist holy men.

Ten people were officially killed when troops opened fire to quell the demonstrations. The opposition has put the death toll much higher.

The ruling-junta seized power in 1988, and although a general election was subsequently held in 1990, the military authorities refused to honor the results when the National League for Democracy Party won. Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for a total of 12 years since 1989.

Prior to this year's protests, the last anti-junta demonstrations in Myanmar were led by students in 1988. Security forces opened fire on crowds, and around 3,000 people were killed.

<http://en.rian.ru/world/20071026/85625148.htm>