

UN envoy set to return to Burma

Burmese pro-democracy activist in Delhi, 23 October 2007

The UN special envoy on Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, will return to Burma for more talks in the first week of November.

Speaking in Delhi, Mr Gambari said the Burmese government had agreed to bring forward the date of his visit.

He said he was encouraged by promises from India to try to help resolve its neighbour's political crisis.

India, which has close ties with Burma, opposes using sanctions in response to the military's suppression of pro-democracy protests last month.

The BBC's Sanjoy Majumder in Delhi says Ibrahim Gambari is keen to return to Burma to try to facilitate a political dialogue between the military authorities and jailed opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Burmese authorities had said he could visit by mid-November but have now accepted his request to come before then, perhaps as early as next week, our correspondent says.

Indian 'concern'

Mr Gambari said it was important for him to go back quickly to keep the momentum going.

"We believe in the UN that there is no alternative to dialogue either in terms of addressing the current crisis but more importantly in terms of laying the foundation of efforts to meet the challenges facing Myanmar [Burma] of a social and economic nature, but also political."

The UN envoy is on a tour of Asian countries to encourage them to take the lead in resolving the crisis in Burma. India and China in particular both have strong ties with the Burmese military regime.

On Tuesday, he met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee.

Afterwards, Mr Gambari said he was very satisfied with India's response.

"I am encouraged by the undertaking which they have given to do everything possible... use their influence to encourage the authorities in Myanmar to continue their co-operation and to deliver tangible results," he told reporters.

"It's up to India to decide what more it can do. But I have indicated the several areas of engagement.

"We would like the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, we want the national reconciliation process to be more inclusive, but also we want the international community to engage the authorities in Myanmar in a comprehensive manner."

But while India has expressed concern over the situation in Burma, it has opposed the use of coercion, including sanctions, our correspondent says.

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