

US diplomat calls on China, India to press Myanmar

Posted: 24 October 2007 0837 hrs

WASHINGTON: Senior US diplomat John Negroponte on Tuesday said China and India had a duty as Asian powers to suspend arms or energy sales to Myanmar's military government over its political repression.

"Now is the time for Beijing and New Delhi to forgo energy deals that put money in the pockets of the junta and suspend weapons sales to this regime," Negroponte said in a speech in Washington.

"This is the burden of maintaining the credibility of the United Nations and the international system," said the deputy secretary of state at a conference on Asia at the American Enterprise Institute, a right-leaning US think tank.

Negroponte said China and India had become important world powers amid robust economic growth but said their rise obliged them to play a bigger role in international efforts and in the case of Myanmar -- to back up UN calls for an end to the crackdown against pro-democracy activists.

"Sometimes being a leader requires difficult choices and national sacrifices for the greater good," Negroponte said.

He added: "We hope that China and India will urge the Burmese generals to work with the UN special envoy Ibrahim Gambari."

Myanmar's rulers, facing international condemnation over the treatment of democracy protesters, on Tuesday agreed to an early November return visit by Gambari, the UN mediator. On Monday, Myanmar authorities cleared the first visit by the UN's top human rights official in four years.

Myanmar has been in the world spotlight since pro-democracy protests spearheaded by the country's revered Buddhist monks were violently put down by the military last month.

Negroponte also said China and India, having profited from global trade, should push for free trade reforms in World Trade Organization talks.

"Now is the time as beneficiaries of the global trading system for Asian powers like China and India to take the lead in trade liberalization under the WTO's Doha round.

"The world needs and expects today's global winners to be tomorrow's pace setters, not to lag behind the pack," he said.

The US diplomat, who served in Vietnam as a young foreign service officer in the 1960s and later worked on the US opening to China during Richard Nixon's presidency, said greater power for some Asian states carried responsibilities as well.

"As nations increasingly become players in the international system, they must play a role in the maintenance and strengthening of that system," he said.

"At the same time, international organizations conceived a generation ago, must adapt to Asia's rise," Negroponte said.

- AFP/ir

http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/307450/1/.html