

## **U.N. leaders appeal for international assistance; India loathe to comply**

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September 14, 2007 - Three noted United Nations representatives, on Thursday, called on Burmese and international leaders to work toward the release of all political prisoners arrested as a result of peacefully protesting the recent government-imposed price-hikes; while an Indian official unequivocally gave notice that any change was up to the people of Burma alone.

In a statement, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Ambeyi Ligabo, and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Leandro Despouy, warned that the recent arrests "are in violation of internationally recognized human rights standards and should not be tolerated by the international community."

The Rapporteur's highlighted the role, and arrests, of women, monk and student leaders in the protests.

They beseeched the Burmese regime to be "proud" of those exercising their fundamental rights within civil society, and encouraged the junta to embark on a "road map for a healthy and empowered democratic society."

In seeking to rally support from the junta and international community, the statement sounded both a legal and moral note, reading, "Myanmar and the international community have a responsibility to safeguard the universal right to freedom of expression and association."

The Rapporteur's also directly called on regional bodies and the United Nations Human Rights Council, recently reconvened for their sixth session, to take up the issue of Burma.

No country, according to the three officials, can play host to a vibrant, rights respecting civil society if there exists no space in which ordinary citizens can exercise those very basic rights.

Yet Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, speaking today in Bangkok, gave no indication that India, a vital economic partner to the Burmese regime, was up to the task of pressuring the junta down the road of reform.

"The cardinal principle of our foreign policy is non-interference in the domestic affairs of any country," Mukherjee told an audience of assembled dignitaries and journalists at Chulalongkorn University. He went on to say it was up to the people in Burma to decide what they want.

The Indian Foreign Minister also implied that the existence of authoritarian governments in the region was a normality that India had come to accept.

His comments came following his talk on India's "Look East Policy", which drew attention to India's growing economic interests and priorities regarding the situation in Burma.

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