

U.S. Slaps on New Sanctions as Fears Grow of Military Crackdown on Burgeoning Protests

Olivia Ward

The Toronto Star

26 September 2007

As truckloads of armed Burmese soldiers rolled into the centre of Rangoon and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed on two main cities, Buddhist monks and their supporters braced for a crackdown on their escalating protests against the ruling junta.

Military leaders also banned gatherings of more than five people.

() Meanwhile, more than 100,000 demonstrators spilled onto the streets yesterday for another day of protests. They included about 30,000 red-robed monks who set out from Burma's holiest shrine in broiling sunshine, protected by a human chain of 70,000 supporters who prayed and chanted as they walked around Rangoon's city hall.

() The prospect of blood flowing in Burma's streets alarmed world leaders, and U.S. President George W. Bush slapped on new sanctions, along with a warning to the military leaders to end their "regime of fear."

"Americans are outraged by the situation in Burma, where a military junta has imposed a 19-year reign of fear," Bush said at the United Nations in New York.

() Other Western countries joined in the condemnation, and Japan spoke out for the first time, urging "sincere efforts" for national reconciliation and democracy.

But leaders are aware that their options for forcing the notoriously brutal junta to soften its stance are limited.

A representative of Burma's detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, called for an emergency meeting of the Security Council to launch negotiations between the junta and the opposition.

() "The question is how much longer should we wait? We don't want the international community to delay until Burmese people are being killed in the street, and the situation is chaotic and out of control."

With Russia and China guaranteed to oppose it, the use of international force against Burma is ruled out, in spite of the UN's adoption of the **responsibility to protect** vulnerable civilians.

) Although foreign investment and trade with Burma plunged after 1988, it has rebounded in spite of U.S. and European Union sanctions. In 2006, Burma had the highest trade surplus in the junta's 19-year reign, totalling \$2 billion.

The reason, says the online newsletter Irrawaddy produced by Burmese expatriates, is "the large number of customers wanting to buy its natural resources. The regime doesn't have to worry about the U.S. and EU sanctions while China, India, Thailand and South Korea queue up

to buy Burma's natural gas and oil from the country's huge offshore reserves."

Without the co-operation of those countries and Southeast Asian neighbours that act as Burma's financial centres, sanctions won't succeed in toppling the regime.

Full text available at: <http://www.thestar.com/News/article/260618>