

Myanmar Dissident Healthy, U.N. Agent Says After Meeting

The New York Times

May 21, 2006
By REUTERS

YANGON, May 20 (Reuters) — [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#), the detained opposition leader, is in good health, a senior [United Nations](#) official said after a one-hour meeting with her on Saturday, her first contact with an outsider in three years.

"She is well, but, of course, she is still under restriction," Ibrahim Gambari, the United Nations official, told Reuters in the Bangkok airport after his three-day mission to the military-ruled country.

The meeting at a Yangon guest house followed an audience between Mr. Gambari and Gen. Than Shwe, the ruling military junta's chief, in his new jungle capital, where the envoy said he delivered a message from the United Nations secretary general, [Kofi Annan](#). Mr. Gambari did not give details of the message.

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has been in prison or under house arrest for the last three years, her telephone disconnected and all visitors barred apart from her maid and doctor.

"She feels she has a contribution to make and I hope she will be allowed to make it," Mr. Gambari said.

Mr. Gambari, the United Nations undersecretary general for political affairs, is the first senior official from the world body in two years to be allowed into [Myanmar](#), the former Burma, which has been under military rule of one form or another since 1962.

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's brief trip to Mr. Gambari's government guest house sparked immediate hopes inside her National League for Democracy Party she might be released soon. She has been under house arrest for more than 10 of the last 16 years. "This makes us optimistic," a party spokesman, U Lwin, said. "Slowly, slowly, catch the monkey."

According to one Yangon-based diplomat briefed by Mr. Gambari, Than Shwe had agreed to "try to find common ground" with the National League party — a stance echoed by the opposition and Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi. The diplomat said Than Shwe had also told Mr. Gambari that Yangon would "explore ways" to give humanitarian United Nations missions and aid groups better access to the impoverished southeast Asian nation.

There is little to suggest, however, that the junta is about to make peace with Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi or her party, which won a 1990 election by a landslide only to be denied power by the army. Last month, the government accused the party of having ties to "terrorists and destructive groups" and said there were grounds to ban it.

On Thursday, President Bush renewed broad penalties against Yangon for failing to take any recognizable steps toward restoring democracy or improving its record on human rights.

Mr. Gambari had also been expected to query the junta about what appeared to be its biggest offensive against the Karen minority ethnic group in a decade. Thousands of Karen, a mainly Christian ethnic minority who make up around 10 percent of the population, have fled to the Thai-Myanmar border since December to escape what some described as genocide at the hands of the junta.