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Myanmar Standoff Appears to Soften

By THOMAS FULLER

BANGKOK, Friday, Nov. 9 — In a surprising break from years of deadlock in [Myanmar](#), the pro-democracy leader [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#) said she was ready to “cooperate” with the government, and the ruling junta said on state television that she would be allowed to meet with the leadership of her political party, something that has not happened in at least three years.

“In the interest of the nation, I stand ready to cooperate with the government in order to make this process of dialogue a success,” Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi said in a statement read in Singapore by the [United Nations](#) special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari. He had just concluded a six-day mission to the country.

The junta also said Thursday that its liaison, General Aung Kyi, would meet with Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday, their second meeting since his appointment last month. As late as Tuesday, a spokesman for the junta said she must abandon her support for sanctions against Myanmar before more talks could take place.

The moves appeared to represent a small but possibly significant step toward reconciliation between the sides, which have been at loggerheads since 1990, when Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi’s party overwhelmingly won in elections. The junta ignored the results and placed her under house arrest, where she has spent 12 of the last 18 years.

Some analysts said the violent suppression of demonstrations in September, especially the crackdown on peacefully protesting monks, had weakened the government’s standing and might have created an opening for a gradual return to democracy. “This could be the beginning of an orderly change process,” said Zarni, a visiting research fellow at [Oxford University](#). “In terms of real substantive change there is no other way than evolutionary.”

Mr. Zarni, who goes by one name, says he has noticed signs of a change in the ruling generals’ attitude toward Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi. For years, he said, the state-controlled media called her Daw Suu Kyi, omitting the part of her name that refers to her father, Aung San, the revolutionary hero revered by the Burmese Army as its founder. Now they use her full name.

Far-reaching or superficial, the seeming easing of tension between the junta and Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi seems to be at least partly engineered by Mr. Gambari, who issued his own statement on Thursday saying he had established a “process” that would “lead to substantive dialogue” between her and the generals.

The progress came at the end of a trip that showed few signs of success. Mr. Gambari bowed to the junta’s demands that Charles Petrie, the highest-ranking United Nations official in Myanmar, leave the country. Mr. Petrie, who said he would leave by the end of the month, angered the ruling generals in October by saying that Myanmar’s humanitarian situation was deteriorating.

And the military leadership appeared to snub Mr. Gambari. He was denied a meeting with the country's top general, Than Shwe, and his initiatives were rejected, including the suggestion that he directly broker talks between Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the junta.

Mr. Gambari was lectured by the country's information minister, Brig. Gen. Kyaw Hsan, and the minutes of their meetings were published in *The New Light of Myanmar*, the government mouthpiece.

General Kyaw Hsan accused Mr. Gambari of being biased in favor of Western powers, suggested he was ignorant of Myanmar's history, declared his previous visit did not bear fruit and warned, "It would be a very serious mistake if Myanmar's affair is viewed superficially." He demanded that Mr. Gambari "play a leading role in organizing and persuading others to relieve and lift sanctions" on Myanmar.

The attacks on the United Nations' mediation efforts, which took up over two pages of the Wednesday edition of *The New Light of Myanmar*, led some analysts to question whether the government was serious about moving toward democracy.

Aung Din, a former Burmese student activist who is now policy director of the United States Campaign for Burma, a Washington-based lobbying group, said he believed that the ruling generals were sensing a rift between the United States, which is pressing for a harder stance against them, and some European countries that are currently debating whether the government should be offered enticements like financial assistance for reform.

"They know to play a game to divide the international community," Mr. Aung Din said.

Mr. Gambari is returning to New York to report to the Security Council and says he plans on returning to Myanmar several weeks from now.

David Steinberg, director of Asian Studies at [Georgetown University](#), says future missions may have more urgency because the government lost legitimacy in the eyes of many people in the overwhelmingly Buddhist country when it reacted violently to the peaceful protests by monks.

"They can't go back to where they were before — this is a watershed crisis, a different kind," Mr. Steinberg said. "The frustrations in the populace are cumulative. The next crisis is going to be more bloody, more difficult. Unless there are changes within that government, you're going to have real trouble."

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