

UN envoy Razali meets senior leader in Yangon

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YANGON, Sat. — Attempting to reconcile Myanmar's military rulers and democracy advocates, a special United Nations envoy met today with a powerful figure in the junta.

It was the third visit to Myanmar by Tan Sri Razali Ismail since his appointment as envoy in April last year.

During his last trip, in January, Razali announced that the opposing sides had been holding secret talks.

Official sources said Razali met with Secretary One Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt of the country's ruling body, the State Peace and Development Council.

Details of the meeting were not immediately known and it was unclear if Razali would meet with pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is being held under virtual house arrest.

Razali, who will be in the country until Monday, met with Foreign Minister Win Aung on arrival yesterday and was scheduled to talk with representatives of the country's ethnic minorities.

The junta has come under widespread criticism, mainly by the West, for refusing to hand over power to Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, which won the 1999 general elections.

Instead, NLD members have been subjected to harassment and arrests. Suu Kyi has lived under virtual house arrest since Sept 22, when she tried to defy a long-standing travel ban.

After his January visit, Razali revealed that the junta and the opposition have been holding secret talks since last October.

Both parties have agreed to keep the content of the dialogue confidential. There has been no news about the developments after nearly eight months.

Razali's visit assumes greater significance in the light of reports by diplomats that the talks are not showing any progress.

Last month the government denied that the talks were stalled and Win Aung, the foreign minister, said the negotiations were not merely a "publicity stunt" to appease the West.

Until October, the junta had consistently refused to negotiate with the opposition if Suu Kyi took part. The change of heart to revive the talks is believed to have been brought about by Razali as well as Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. — AP