

Security 'Council may take up Myanmar's case

SUN 23 JUL 2003

NUSA DUA (Indonesia): UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan may refer the raging Myanmar issue to the Security Council unless the country's military rulers release pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi soon, diplomats said yesterday ahead of ministerial talks here between Asia and Europe.

The pressure on Myanmar built up as senior officials from Europe messed for the inclusion of the issue on the agenda of the meeting of foreign ministers from the two continents beginning today on the resort island of Bali.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad warned at the weekend that Myanmar might have to be expelled from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) if its military junta defies world pressure to release Suu Kyi.

Annan's special envoy on Myanmar, former Malaysian diplomat Razali Ismail, "is not too optimistic" about an early release, according to a delegate to the Asia Europe Meeting (Asem) here.

Razali expressed his pessimism during a recent meeting in New York with permanent representatives to the UN from several key Asian and European countries and the United States, the delegate said.

"Razali indicated that the UN Secretary-General will consider the possibility of including Myanmar on the agenda of the Security Council if there is no immediate

resolution to the problem," the delegate told AFP.

The Myanmar regime announced on May 31 that Suu Kyi had been detained after a junta-backed mob attacked her supporters in violence feared to have left dozens dead.

The international community has responded angrily, with the US and European Union beefing up sanctions and Asean issuing an unprecedented call last month for her immediate release.

Meanwhile, an official said yesterday that Asian nations will push for the inclusion of Myanmar in a key Asia-Europe forum even though most of them have criticised the military-ruled nation for detaining Suu Kyi.

Only seven of the 10 members of Asean - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sinaanore. Thailand and Vietnam - together with China, Japan and South Korea represent the region in the Asem forum.

Aside from Myanmar, two other Asean newcomers Cambodia and Laos are not Asem members.

The 15 European Union members, who make up the other side of the Asem grouping, have objected to Myanmar's inclusion due to the detention of Suu Kyi.

"Asean's position is that we are asking to include Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia in Asem. It should be a priority and in one package," Indonesian foreign ministry official Retno Marsudi told reporters. - AFP