

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. Sees “Positive Trend” from Burma’s Leadership

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. official in charge of coordinating policy toward Burma says he believes the Burmese government has recently taken “a trend towards greater openness,” but that it is still unclear whether it has chosen to take the “real path” of reforming its human rights practices and political system.

Speaking to reporters in Washington October 17, Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma Derek Mitchell said the recent release of some political prisoners and other gestures by Burma’s rulers have been welcomed by the Obama administration and appear to signify some kind of change from the regime.

“Those who have followed Burma for many years, as I have, have seen stops and starts. I’m not sure we’ve seen anything necessarily exactly like we’ve seen over the past several months,” Mitchell said.

The special representative visited Burma in September and was able to meet with both government officials and some opposition figures, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate and National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

“In talking to people inside the country, they, themselves, say that they are seeing something that is a bit different than they’ve seen before,” Mitchell said. “But there are still questions about how far they’re going to go and where this is going to lead.”

Mitchell, who said he is the first to hold the position of special representative and policy coordinator, began his duties in August. He said his role is not only to pursue the Obama administration’s dual-track approach toward Burma, which involves both economic sanctions and engagement with regime officials, but also “to provide a sort of senior-level face focusing on the issue 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

He said his face-to-face meetings with Burmese officials have established “a good baseline for a very candid relationship between the two sides that we really haven’t seen, I would say, in many, many years.”

The United States has been “sending signals” in response to recent signs of Burmese openness, such as lifting its travel restrictions on Burmese officials to travel to New York in September to the United Nations General Assembly, and it has invited a Burmese delegation to participate as an observer at the new Friends of the Lower Mekong initiative, which promotes ways to sustainably and equitably develop the Lower Mekong region.

“We’re bringing them into some of the international dialogues that occur and looking at other gestures in turn,” Mitchell said.

But the Obama administration still wants to see progress in relations between the government and ethnic minorities in the country — violence is continuing, with credible reports that human rights abuses, including actions against women and children, are taking place, Mitchell said.

In discussions with Burmese officials, he said, “we made it very clear that we could not have a transformed relationship as long as these abuses and credible reports of abuses occur, and as long as there is not dialogue with these groups and with the opposition and violence remains.”

He urged the government to release all remaining political prisoners without condition as a “signal of genuine commitment to democracy.”

“Any political prisoners are too many political prisoners,” Mitchell said, and many of those who remain captive, such as Ko Ko Gyi, Min Ko Naing and U Gambira, are seeking a credible and democratic Burma.

“If you’re serious about democratic reform, you would see [them] as allies, because they actually are seeking the same goals you are,” he said he told Burmese leaders.

Mitchell said the otherwise “encouraging signs” from Burmese leaders are “raising expectations both inside and outside the country.” The United States will respond to continued movements toward freedom and openness with “gestures [and] steps in return,” he added.

“If, in fact, we do see change — reform along those lines of democracy, human rights, national reconciliation and development — they will have a partner in the United States,” he said. Burma’s leadership and people, as well as its neighbors and the United States, will benefit as the country’s reforms allow it to rejoin the international community.

“Right now I think there are a lot of restrictions that make them into a pariah state. And Burma is a proud country with a tremendous history, and they deserve to come out of the shadows and ... take their prideful place in the region,” Mitchell said.

USAID Launches Five-Year, Humanitarian Assistance Program in Central Burma

USAID Press Release for Burmese Media on USAID's New Humanitarian Assistance Award in the Dry Zone
October 17, 2011

On September 26, 2011, the United States Agency for International Development's Regional Development Mission for Asia (USAID/RDMA) launched "*Shae Thot: The Way Forward*", a new, five-year program to provide humanitarian assistance to communities in central Burma.

Pact, a non-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., will implement the program on behalf of USAID, building on fourteen years of experience working in Burma in the sectors of health, income-generation, micro-finance, livelihoods support, and disaster management. *Shae Thot* will provide resources and technical assistance to increase community-based knowledge and strengthen the innate capacities of local communities, encouraging community participation and sustainable solutions in the areas of maternal and child health; livelihoods; food security; and water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Through U. S. Government funding, *Shae Thot* brings together a unique partnership of experienced organizations with more than 40 collective years implementing assistance programs in Burma. Implementing partners include: Marie Stopes International, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Cooperazione e Sviluppo (Cooperation and Development, CESVI), UN-HABITAT, and Myanmar Survey Research (MSR). Together these organizations will work to address pressing humanitarian needs in approximately 3,100 or more villages in Rangoon Division, the Dry Zone and Southern Shan State.

U.S. Firms Reach Out to Biotech Markets in China

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington – A deal between a California-based biotechnology corporation and a Chinese medical apparatus company is one of the highlights of a life sciences trade mission, which includes 19 companies in that field led by an official from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

DiaCarta LLC and Kodia Biotechnology Co. Ltd. signed a \$2 million agreement for sales of DiaCarta's cervical cancer testing products in China.

"China's biotech sector is growing at roughly 25 percent a year, so it makes sense to bring the products and services of U.S. companies to China to help meet the demand," said Under Secretary for International Trade Francisco

Sánchez as the deal was signed October 14.

After several days in China, the delegation moved on to Hong Kong October 16.

Hong Kong has more than 200 pharmaceutical companies, according to a U.S. Commerce Department press release, with research facilities, business infrastructure and regulatory linkages into the Chinese mainland. These business fundamentals "make it a promising market for U.S. firms," according to the release.

"The biotechnology sector is critical to the continued growth of technology, commerce and health care in both the United States and Hong Kong," said Sánchez, "and U.S. companies have world-class products and services to offer to help meet Hong Kong's growing demand."

Corporate representatives on the mission are getting a firsthand view of the Chinese markets and access to government decisionmakers in their fields. They are being introduced to distributors, public and private buying agents and other potential business partners, gathering information that will influence potential plans for entering the Chinese market.

The Obama administration's National Export Initiative, proposed by the president in early 2010, motivates this trade mission. The initiative's goal is to double exports over the next five years and, in doing so, support several million new jobs in the United States. The administration calculates that every \$1 billion increase in exports would support more than 6,000 jobs.

In one 2010 speech, President Obama said the initiative represents a team effort between government and business, which should lead to private-public partnerships devoted to increasing trade relationships. It is "an ambitious effort to team up with America's businesses, large and small, and help them unleash their energy and innovation, grow their markets, support new jobs selling their goods and services all across the globe," he said.

Obama also said, "We're bringing to bear the full resources of the United States government," by ordering all agencies involved in trade to examine their activities and look for opportunities to boost markets and expand exports.

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