

Envoys meet to plan relief assistance

Rangoon (Reuter, AP) — Ambassadors from aid-donating countries met yesterday to discuss ways of relieving a worsening food and medical-supply situation.

"Medicine and food are very definitely needed, but the problem is there are no planes or boats available to take them in," a Western ambassador said.

"The transport situation in Burma is paralysed ... We know there is enough rice in Burma and within a hundred miles of Rangoon but the problem is getting the stuff into the city," he said.

Virtually all industry and services in the country of 38 million people, once known as the rice bowl of Asia, have halted after months of anti-govt demonstrations and strikes.

The ambassador said the city's three sources of medical supplies — local manufacturers, imports and the black market — had dried up.

Food and medicine problems have been compounded by strikes at banks that have led to currency shortages.

The ambassador said the situation was delicate for foreign states because some channels for aid were in the hands of the government, while others were controlled by the opposition.

A Western diplomat quoted newspaper accounts as saying students and Buddhist monks were getting some rice into Rangoon from the countryside, and the army was helping transport it to needy people.

The Prome oil refinery in central Burma, previously reported closed by striking workers, is producing some fuel for the military, he added. But much of that fuel is reportedly finding its way to the black market in Rangoon, allowing some civilian vehicles in the capital to run.

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