

Headline
Date
MediaTitle
Section
Journalist
Frequency
Circ / Read

UN development chief says Myanmar and Thailand face challenges
17 Jun 2010
Daily Express (KK)
World
N/A
Daily (EM)
30,557 / 97,836

Language
Page No
Article Size
Color
ADValue
PRValue
English
L-17
128 cm²
Black/white
264
791



UN development chief says Myanmar and Thailand face challenges

HANOI: Myanmar faces a tough task to eradicate extreme poverty and meet other global development goals, while political instability is holding back Thailand's progress, the UN development chief says.

In an interview with AFP, Helen Clark also said Vietnam had "a pretty good story to tell" about its efforts to achieve the so-called Millennium Development Goals, but faces a major challenge from climate change and rising sea levels.

Clark said military-ruled Myanmar, with "huge poverty", will find it difficult to meet any of the eight development goals by the 2015 global target.

"It would be tough," Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said Tuesday on the sidelines of a conference.

The former New Zealand prime Minister said Myanmar has the lowest foreign aid per capita of any developing country, and "political factors" restrict what the UNDP can do in Myanmar, "so it's not so easy to make progress there at this time."

Myanmar, which has detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi for most of the past two decades, is under European Union and United States sanctions.

Neighbouring Thailand has made reasonable progress in tackling poverty, Clark said, but further development is being hindered by political tensions.

Outbreaks of violence in Bangkok during two months of anti-government protests from March until May killed 90 people, wounded nearly 1,900, and left the country deeply divided.

"Clearly, instability holds back a country's development progress, and you end up punching below your weight when you could be punching to, or above, your weight," she said.

The unrest followed more than three years of political instability after the army seized power from then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in a 2006 bloodless coup.

"Things haven't been stable since and I think what's really needed is a national dialogue on how to move to

elections which are seen as free and fair and people will accept the result," said Clark, who assumed her post in April last year.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called a September summit in New York to accelerate efforts toward reaching the 2015 development goals deadline.

Clark said Vietnam will be able to report good progress towards the goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, and reducing child and maternal mortality.

The country has work to do to combat HIV/AIDS and add to the existing progress on access to water and basic sanitation, she said, while the environmental cost of old-style industrialisation also needs to be addressed.

But fast-growing Vietnam, which this year is set to attain "middle-income" status, faces a "huge challenge" from climate change, Clark said.

"And I believe that the government is acutely aware of this, aware now that Vietnam is one of the most exposed countries in the world to rising sea levels, intensity and frequency... of adverse weather events like typhoons," she said.

Vietnam is planning for a one-metre (3.3 feet) rise in sea levels by 2100, which would inundate about 31,000 square kilometres (12,400 square miles) of land—an area about the size of Belgium—unless dykes and drainage systems are strengthened, a UN discussion paper said in December.

It said the inundation threat is greatest in the Mekong Delta, the country's main rice production area. Vietnam is the world's second-biggest rice exporter.

If that land becomes unusable there are "serious implications" for the region, Clark said.

She spoke on the sidelines of a conference to review a pilot programme that aims to improve the coherence and effectiveness of UN assistance. Vietnam and Pakistan are among eight countries worldwide participating in the pilot which, the UN says, has hastened achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. — AFP