

DEFIANT SUU KYI BACKED BY US AND UN

Rangoon/New York, September 15, 2000

Aung San Suu Kyi to defy junta ban on travel outside Rangoon



RANGOON, Sept 15 (AFP) - Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said Friday she would make a trip outside Rangoon within the next few days in defiance of the ruling military junta's ban on travel outside the capital.

"As I'm not legally restricted in any way we have decided that it is time for us to make this clear. I shall travel outside Rangoon (Rangoon) within the next few days," the Nobel peace laureate said. "This will be an organised trip and will be done openly," she said to the cheers of 300 supporters outside the National League for Democracy (NLD) headquarters here.

"It is high time the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council -- the junta) government stopped restrictions on the right to operate as a legitimate political party." "It is up to the SPDC to choose any line of action they like." Aung San Suu Kyi looked thin and said she had lost about four pounds (two kilograms) during her nine-day roadside standoff with the military government. No uniformed police were at the headquarters, although some plainclothes police were present.

A British and a US diplomat and members of the foreign press attended the impromptu press conference after an NLD meeting. Aung San Suu Kyi said she would take legal action against the junta for "illegally restricting" her and her group on the outskirts of Dalla, a Rangoon suburb, putting the NLD leadership under house arrest and illegally searching the party headquarters."

But since the judicial organ is in the hands of the military authorities, we all know what would be the result -- even so we'll do it just to show that we cannot accept such unlawful and criminal acts," she said. Previous NLD attempts at legal redress have all been unsuccessful.

Aung San Suu Kyi thanked the international community and the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for their support during her roadside ordeal and house arrest. "We appreciate everything they did to support our cause and our right to freedom of movement and freedom of organisation, but we would like them to know this is not the end of the story," the daughter of Burma independence hero General Aung San said.

An NLD official said 18 party officials, including elected MP Naing Naing, had been arrested over the past few days even as the junta prepared to lift some of the restrictions imposed on the party leaders. The United States and the UN welcomed the lifting of house arrest but called for the junta to hold dialogue with the opposition.

Annan "reiterates his call for the government of Burma to engage in a substantive political dialogue with opposition leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to initiate the process of national reconciliation as soon as possible," a UN statement said. "I would like to say how gratified I am that the news from Burma (Burma) is that Aung San Suu Kyi is now able to receive some people at her residence, and that the NLD offices have in fact now been re-opened," US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, adding, "she is not yet able to have any kind of free movement around the country."

"The junta Thursday lifted the house arrest placed on Aung San Suu Kyi following the roadside showdown but barred her from leaving the capital. Aung San Suu Kyi and the other members of the party's central executive committee were placed under virtual house arrest on September 2, after she and other NLD leaders tried to attend a party meeting outside the capital. This triggered a prolonged standoff with the junta in which the NLD leaders remained camped by their cars for nine days before being taken back to the capital by security officials.

Aung San Suu Kyi told diplomats Thursday she had been forced back to Rangoon after the standoff, despite statements by the junta saying she had happily returned to the capital. The NLD won a landslide general election victory in 1990, but the junta has never recognised the result and is accused by foreign critics and human rights groups of severe repression of its opponents. Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest for six years and has subsequently had her movements greatly restricted.

Kofi Annan Calls For Dialogue

The NLD won Burma's last democratic elections in 1990 by a landslide but has never been allowed to govern. Suu Kyi spent six years under house arrest by the military until 1995. At the United Nations (news - web sites), Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the lifting of restrictions on Suu Kyi and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she was "gratified."

Albright said authorities in the former Burma should follow up by permitting Suu Kyi to move around the country, while opening a dialogue with the NLD. "The secretary-general reiterates his call for the government of Burma to engage in a substantive political dialogue with opposition leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to initiate the process of national reconciliation as soon as possible," a UN spokesman said.

Albright said a campaign on behalf of Suu Kyi at the United Nations this week seemed to have had an impact. Albright and other female foreign ministers said Tuesday they were "appalled" at her house arrest. "I would only hope that we can continue to voice very loudly our opposition to the Burmese authorities not allowing the democratically elected NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi to take their rightful place and be able to have a dialogue, which is what they want," Albright said.

Suu Kyi said she did not know exactly why the military had eased some of the restrictions on her and her associates. "It could be because of international pressure or it could be simply because of a change of their minds," she said. She said the NLD would challenge the legality of a police raid on NLD offices on September 2. "We can't accept that they raided our party's office because we are a legally organized party. We cannot accept this. So we will try to sue the government (for this)," she said.

Albright "gratified" by end of house arrest for Aung San Suu Kyi

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 14 (AFP) - US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Thursday she was pleased that Burma had ended the house arrest of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and allowed offices of her National League for Democracy (NLD) to reopen. However, Albright also said that the decision to end the house arrest was only a partial measure and called for the international community to continue pressing the military authorities in Burma, formerly Burma, to hold a dialogue with the opposition. "I would like to say how gratified I am that the news from Burma is that Aung San Suu Kyi is now able to receive some people at her residence, and that the NLD offices have in fact now been re-opened," Albright said.

"She is not yet able to have any kind of free movement around the country, but I do believe that a concerted effort here at the United Nations ... to state the international community's disgust with what the government authorities had done has had some impact," Albright said.

US President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in their addresses to the UN Millennium Summit last week, both blasted Rangoon for its detention of Aung San Suu Kyi. She and other senior NLD members were placed under virtual house arrest on September 2, after they tried to attend a party meeting outside the capital.

Albright called for continued efforts by UN members to push for reform in Burma. "I would only hope that we can continue to voice very loudly our opposition to the Burmese authorities not allowing the democratically elected NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi to take their rightful place and be able to have a dialogue which is what they want," Albright told reporters.