

## Extra Feature Story

### Pro-Democracy Icon Suu Kyi Detained After Surprise Visit

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**Aung San Suu Kyi, a key leader in Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, has been charged with violating the terms of her 13-year house arrest by the government's repressive military regime after an American man swam across a lake to reach her compound, just weeks before her sentence was supposed to expire.**

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi, 63, is charged with harboring John William Yettaw for two days even though his visit was reportedly unexpected and unwelcome. Now both Suu Kyi and Yettaw face years in prison.

Analysts believe that Myanmar's military-led government wants to detain Suu Kyi as long as possible to prevent her from challenging their leadership in the country's general elections next year.

In response, the U.S. has imposed severe economic sanctions against Myanmar, the country also known as Burma.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has said that he plans to visit Myanmar to advocate for Suu Kyi's release.

"We are again deeply concerned about the detention. She's a democracy believer. We have a full support and trust in her. And also, she is an indispensable patron for reconsidering the dialogue in Myanmar," Ban said.

#### **Myanmar military regime takes power in coups**

Myanmar was a democracy until 1962 when General Ne Win successfully led a military coup against the government. He ruled the country under a totalitarian system of government that essentially controlled all aspects of Burmese society.

In August of 1988, democratic reformist and peaceful activist Suu Kyi led protests across the nation calling for an end to decades of political oppression and economic hardship under the junta, in what came to be known as the 8888 Uprising.

Military forces suppressed the uprising in another coup, declaring martial law and killing thousands of demonstrators.

#### **Junta ignores elections, detains Suu Kyi**

Although the government held free elections in 1990, they refused to recognize the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy, led by Suu Kyi, who would have become prime minister. Instead, they placed her under house arrest for 13 of the next 19 years, releasing her occasionally only to confine her again.

Myanmar's military regime is considered an oppressive government by human rights advocates, accused of killing, raping and torturing hundreds of thousands of Burmese people.

Human Rights Watch accused the military of torturing hundreds and killing dozens of Buddhist monks during nation-wide protests in 2007.

The government also reportedly blocked aid to thousands of injured and stranded Burmese after Cyclone Nargis struck in May 2008.

**Suu Kyi follows path of MLK, advocates non-violence**

Inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther King and India's Mahatma Gandhi, Suu Kyi believes in non-violent protest and free democratic elections. Known in Myanmar as "the Lady," Suu Kyi has become an international icon for non-violence as a form of resistance.

"Human beings the world over need freedom and security that they may be able to realize their full potential," she has said.

Her son accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf in 1991. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee described her as "an outstanding example of the power of the powerless."

In a famous speech she explained the actions of the corrupt military junta. "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it," she said.

**Is it Myanmar or Burma?**

The name of Myanmar, also known as Burma, is often the subject of confusion and political controversy.

When the British took control of the country in 1886, it was known in English as "Burma." After the controversial military junta rose to power in 1989, they changed the name from "Burma" to "Myanmar."

Opponents of Myanmar's oppressive regime continue to use the name "Burma" as a form of protest against the new government.

International reactions to the name change have been mixed. The United Nations calls the country "Myanmar" whereas many individual nations like the United States and the United Kingdom prefer to use the name "Burma."

**-- Compiled by Kate Stanton for NewsHour Extra**

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