

Suu Kyi marks six years in detention

AP, Yangon

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was back in court yesterday on charges she violated the law by sheltering an uninvited American visitor, as Asian and Western leaders, including President Barack Obama, heaped criticism on Myanmar's military regime.

Suu Kyi insisted in testimony Tuesday that she did not violate the law. The trial, which is expected to culminate in a guilty verdict, has continued despite an international outcry, including unprecedented criticism from neighboring governments in Asia.

President Obama said Tuesday that Suu Kyi's continued detention, isolation and "show trial based on spurious charges" cast serious doubt on the Myanmar government's willingness to be a responsible member of the international community.

Asian and European ministers, meeting in Vietnam, urged Myanmar to release Suu Kyi, lift restrictions on political parties, and prepare for free, fair and multiparty elections in 2010. Myanmar's neighbor Thailand has said it has "grave concerns" about the trial.

*Aung San Suu Kyi is an

indispensable partner in the dialogue leading to national reconciliation in Myanmar," Jan Kohout, deputy prime minister of the Czech Republic, said in Hanoi. "She should be released immediately." The Czech Republic currently holds the presidency of the European Union.

About 150 local activists staged a peaceful demonstration in front of Myanmar's embassy in Cambodia's capital Wednesday and a similar rally was held in Bangkok.

In Yangon, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy marked two milestones - Suu Kyi's sixth year under continuous detention and the 19th anniversary of their overwhelming election victory, which the junta has never recognized.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate has spent more than 13 of the past 19 years in detention without trial, most at her dilapidated Yangon home.

During Tuesday's court session, Suu Kyi, 63, looked pale and weak as she answered judges' questions, giving brief, carefully phrased replies about the incident earlier this month that could lead to her being sent to prison for five years.



Picture top shows Pakistani paramilitary troops securing the area in front of the destroyed police emergency response office building following a suicide car bomb attack in Lahore yesterday, while rescuers (picture bottom) take cover as gunshots are heard while attempting to remove a trapped policeman.

PHOTOS: AFP

Survivors tell of Pak blast devastation

AFP, Lahore

"All of a sudden there was firing and a huge blast. The wall collapsed on me. I was trapped in the wreckage and fell unconscious," said an elderly man, plucked from the rubble of a Pakistan bomb.

One of those lucky enough to be rescued from the remains of a police building in the security heartland of Lahore -- lying in hospital he remembered the van racing towards the offices, then gunshots, then the explosion.

Rescue workers and passers-by -- their clothing stained with blood -- clawed with bare hands at rubble and twisted metal desperately trying to free dozens of people buried alive when a suicide car bomb flattened the building.

They carried the wounded on their backs and on stretchers, stumbling over piles of bricks, twisted iron bars and severed human limbs as they rushed them to hospitals, which officials said were treating around 300 wounded.

Police and administrators said about 23 people were killed in the blast, the third deadly attack to hit Lahore in as many months.

The building, where police were on duty responding to distress calls, was devastated and the impact of the attack, which witnesses likened to being in an earthquake, shattered windows and toppled concrete blast barriers.

Police official Mohammad Yaseen said he was driving a motorbike when he was flung to the ground with shrapnel injuries.

"A huge bang rocked the entire area... I was hit by flying objects like glass shrapnel. I fell to the ground. I recovered and saw thick black

smoke billowing. There were lots of shouts and cries," he said.

One man in a traditional white shirt was buried up to his waist in debris, as volunteers desperately threw aside bricks and rubble in a bid to free him, television footage showed.

Policemen staggered from the devastated building in the heart of the liberal cultural capital, worried for scores of their colleagues still trapped.

"I heard firing and then a huge blast," said one, saying there were 30 to 35 policemen trapped inside. "The building collapsed. I was at the back of the building and am fortunately alive."

Up to five attackers, including two in a van packed with explosives, opened fire at security guards and threw hand grenades, before the vehicle detonated into a ball of fire on the road in the security nerve centre of Lahore.

Ambulances rushed to the scene and a large crane shifted mounds of debris.

Another police officer, too panicked to give his name, said he rushed out of the building when he heard 20 shots ring out.

"We came out to see it, then they hurled a grenade and all of a sudden a vehicle exploded," he told reporters.

"Windows of the nearby buildings and houses were shattered -- over a dozen vehicles were destroyed... It was a huge blast which created a 15-foot (4.5-metre) deep and 17-foot wide crater."

The bomb hit one of the busiest junctions of Lahore, less than 500 metres (yards) from Mall Road, an upmarket shopping and dining boulevard, and its impact was felt up to two kilometres (more than a mile) away.

Manmohan finalises cabinet

Ministers take oath today

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expands his council of ministers today, adding 14 cabinet ministers, including three former chief ministers and three DMK leaders, and 45 ministers of state.

Ahead of the second swearing-in, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday held consultations to give finishing touches to the list of ministers.

Around 50 ministers including Farooq Abdullah, Salman Khurshid and Mallikarjun Kharge are likely to be inducted in the second round of cabinet expansion on Thursday.

Of the ministers of state, seven will have independent charge.

The cabinet ministers include Virbhadr Singh, former Himachal Pradesh chief minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, former Maharashtra chief minister, and Farooq Abdullah, former

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister.

The others are Dayanidhi Maran, M.K. Azhagari and A. Raja of the DMK. From the Congress, the ministers will be Mallikarjun Kharge, Kumari Selja, Subodh Kant Sahay, M.S. Gill, G.K. Vasan, Pawan Kumar Bansal, Mukul Wasnik and Kantilal Bhuria.

The ministers with independent charge are Praful Patel of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress' Prithviraj Chavan, Sriprakash Jaiswal, Salman

Khurshid, Jairam Ramesh, Krishna Tirath and Dinsha Patel.

Congress sources said that fifty per cent of the names had been finalised last evening itself at the meeting of the Congress Core Committee after which the party president held a three-hour-long meeting with the prime minister.

The expansion exercise is expected to involve a 14 cabinet ministers, around seven ministers of state with independent charge and 30 ministers of state.

Pak Police arrest three 'terrorists' planning more attacks

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police said yesterday they had arrested three men suspected of planning attacks on government buildings in the capital, as a suicide bombing targeted police in the cultural hub Lahore.

A senior police official said the men came from a north-west district where the military has been pressing a month-long offensive against the Taliban, and that explosives and suicide jackets were seized in the sting operation.

"We have nabbed three terrorists. They entered Islamabad to carry out sabotage acts. They hailed from Buner and were planning to target government installations here," he said, adding that interrogations were underway.

Buner is one of three north-west districts where government troops unleashed a massive offensive after armed Taliban fighters advanced to within 100 kilometres of Islamabad last month.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik said the suicide car bomb in Lahore, which destroyed a police building, killing 23 people, was carried out to avenge the offensive, which has been praised in the United States.

Survivors separated in Tamil refugee camps



GUARDIAN ONLINE, Menik Farm

The three children standing in the dirt outside the tent in Sri Lanka's newest internment camp have not seen their mother for weeks, ever since a shell exploded next to the bunker where they had taken cover, ripping a hole in her stomach.

Medics rushed 29-year-old Sandi to a makeshift hospital, where doctors operated to save her life. All that Sandi's husband, 33-year-old Yogisuran, and the children Thuyanthini, Kuwanthini and Thusiyanthini know is that she was later evacuated on a ship by the International Committee of the Red Cross. They have not seen her since, and trapped with tens of thousands of others in the Menik Farm camp they are powerless to do anything about it.

Another camp refugee, Threekanden, 27, is similarly distraught at the disappearance of a loved one. He produces a picture of himself and his wife, Pokonai, on their wedding day. They were split up last month, he said, when the army advanced on the last Tamil Tiger redoubt in northern Sri Lanka. "Now I cannot find my wife or our daughter. The girl is only four and my wife was nine months pregnant. I don't know where they are. We need help to find them."

Countless civilians herded into Sri Lanka's sprawling internment camps are in the same position, unable to locate or contact relatives missing or separated during the bloody chaos that ensued during the final weeks of the military onslaught on the Tamil Tigers. More than 200,000 refugees are corralled inside Menik Farm, a sweltering 1,400 acres of scrubland sealed off by barbed wire. Some are still hoping to find relatives amid the rows of tents that provide a temporary home. But others say relatives were separated out by the military, suspected of being Tamil Tigers. The Sri Lankan government says it has so far identified more than 9,000 members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and is sending them to "rehabilitation centres", where they will be held for years.

The government claims that it needs to keep the civilians in camps it is building in the north of the country until it can be sure that they are not members of the LTTE. The camps sprawl out over a vast area, mile after mile of tents where the unfortunate civilians displaced by the recent fighting have been told they could spend up to two years before they are allowed to go home.

Navaratnam Rasapalan, 31, said he arrived at Menik Farm on 18 May. He lost contact with

his wife, Jagadah, and three children, aged seven, five and three, on 18 April when the army advanced.

"The army cut off the civilians in a box and I could not find them," he said. "I just want to find them. I don't know what to do. Please help me to find them." Several others in the same part of the camp had similar stories.

Evidence of the brutality of civil war was everywhere. One young woman, who gave her name as Banji, was carrying her 18-month-old daughter, Umarani. The child's head was wrapped in a tattered bandage and her right hand was bound up. She had been hit by shrapnel from a shell, her mother said, which had gashed her head and broken some of her fingers.

The tactics of herding civilians into internment camps indefinitely has been widely criticised, and yesterday the authorities offered up contradictory explanations. Officials and military officers at the camps variously claimed that the civilians were there for their own safety, for the safety of the rest of the population and because most "have been involved in some sort of activity for the LTTE". Some officials said that screening of the civilians was taking place inside the camps, others that it was not.

How Rahul Gandhi gained his strength

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The secret behind the stamina of Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family, who was Congress' star campaigner in recent general elections braving scorching heat, is out.

Well, it lies in lessons in boxing the 38-year-old Congress party leader took for two months much before the elections to keep himself physically fit and psychologically tough to face the rigours of the campaign.

For Rahul, it was a three-day a week strenuous workout for

two months with the punching bag in the boxing ring as he learnt lessons from well-known 70-year-old coach Om Prakash Bharadwaj in 2008.

Bharadwaj, winner of India's highest sports award "Dronacharya" (named after the character of the same name in the epic "Mahabharata" who taught archery), said Rahul had come to him to learn boxing in order to keep himself physically and psychologically fit to withstand the rigours of political life.

"It was a great opportunity for me to train Rahul Gandhi for two months last year," he said.



General view of a partially submerged village, seen from an Indian Air Force helicopter delivering food packets, in the mangrove-covered delta region the Sunderbans, some 100 km south of Kolkata, yesterday. Major relief operations are underway in India after cyclone Aila tore into the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal, killing over a hundred and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless.

PHOTO: AFP

Nobody in govt to pressurise me

FROM PAGE 16

public undertakings. "They [the lawmakers] are elected representatives. They are lawmakers. Lawmakers have the authority to make such a call. That [parliament] is the highest body of the country," he added.

He, however, said he would follow the ACC Act regarding appearing before the parliamentary standing committee.

"Not just the MPs, everyone has to be accountable for their work. Nobody is above the law," said Ghulam, who was appointed the ACC chief on April 30 following resignation of former ACC chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury.

"People are the supreme judge. Parliament is an institution constituted with people's representatives. But it is different when members of parliament are considered as individuals. They will be punished as individuals if they carry out any illegal activity," he explained.

The punishment will be considered in proportionate with the gravity of the offence," he added.

On his future approach to deal with the anti-

corruption drive, the new ACC chief said, "It is better to make surprise attacks... I will follow the law in spirit and words. My work will not deviate from what is said in the ACC Act."

According to him, the process must be simplified, transparent and accountable while many things should be made automatic.

Asked about probable pressure from the government, he said, "Nobody will pressurise me. Those who matter in the government know me very well. I believe they will not bother me."

Ghulam said he expects that everyone will help him carry out his job. "I will work with different departments of the government and with relevant people to reduce the sources of corruption."

On the government's recent effort to review and bring necessary amendments to the ACC Act to make the body more effective, Ghulam said, "The government wants to reduce corruption, not to increase it. And this effort is a welcome step towards that end."

"A democratic government will not formulate any law that encourages corruption. And a government of

the people will not undermine any law," he said.

Asked what is the use of the commission's status as being independent if the government feels to reform it before the commission itself feels this, Ghulam said, "There is nothing called absolute independence anywhere in the world. Organisations have to depend on the government for budget allocations. A check and balance must be there. The question is if there is liberty to carry out duty."

Asked if the ACC will pursue the cases against Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, he said, "Everything will be done in accordance with law."

On the alleged legal complexity regarding his appointment as the ACC chairman because he is already the chairman of another commission, Ghulam said in Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Act 2003 there is a provision to resign the post or seek relieve from the president by giving a 30-day notification.

"I have sent a letter to the president, seeking relieve, and I expect to join my new office around June 24, a month from submission of my letter. And there would be no legal complexity," said Ghulam.

FROM PAGE 16

the National Press Club in the city, they raised their voice against the proposed dam.

"We demand for detailed design and other technical information on the proposed dam," said Bapa general secretary Abdul Matin in his keynote presentation.

Bangladesh must register its protest against the dam before it is built, he said, adding that Surma, Kushiara and Meghna rivers would dry up and Sylhet region would be flooded during rainy season if India constructs the dam.

"What is power-luxury for India is a life-and-death question for Bangladesh," said Bapa president Prof Muzaffer Ahmad. "Energy cannot be more important than human disaster."

He condemned recent statements by a couple of ministers that the damage would be assessed after the dam is built. "Refrain from utterances that may harm interests of the country and the people," said Prof Ahmad.

Responding to commerce minister's comment that people are talking of the dam without knowing about it, Prof Ahmad said, "We have been working on Tipaimukh dam issue since 2004 and we invite the minister to have a share of what information we have."

Tipaimukh is going to be more disastrous than Farakka barrage that has destroyed river Padma and ecology in the country's southwestern region, he said.

ASM Shahjahan, former advisor to a caretaker govern-

ment and Bapa vice-president, said that the government must forge a consensus among all political parties to deal with the issue.

Construction of river dams is contradictory to global combat on climate change, said Bapa Secretary General Matin.

The proposed dam is to be built 100 kilometres upstream of the confluence of Surma and Kushiara rivers at Jokiganj border in Sylhet. The dam will be 1500 feet long and 500 feet high. Expected power generation capacity of the dam is 1500 megawatt. Indian authorities have targeted to complete the project by 2012, said Matin.

Bapa central leaders Taqsem A Khan, architect Iqbal Habib and Sharif Jamil among others were present.