

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 US 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.

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.

LIST OF COUNCIL MINISTERS

CABINET MINISTERS	MINISTERS OF STATE WITH INDEPENDENT CHARGE	MINISTERS OF STATE
1. Shri Virbhadra Singh 2. Shri Vilasrao Deshmukh 3. Dr Farooq Abdullah 4. Shri Dayanidhi Maran 5. Shri A Raja 6. Shri Mallikarjun Kharge 7. Kumar Selja 8. Shri Subodh Kant Sahay 9. Dr M S Gill 10. Shri G K Vasan 11. Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal 12. Shri Mukul Wasnik 13. Shri Kantilal Bhuria 14. Shri M K Azhagiri	1. Shri Praful Patel 2. Shri Pritviraj Chauhan 3. Shri Sripakash Jaiswal 4. Shri Salman Khurshed 5. Shri Drishti Patel 6. Shri Jairam Ramesh 7. Smt Krishna Tirath	1. Shri E Ahamed 2. Shri V Narayanasamy 3. Shri Srikant Jena 4. Shri Sripalay 5. Smt D Purandeswari 6. Smt Panabaka Lakshmi 7. Shri Ajay Maken 8. Shri K H Muniyappa 9. Shri Nam Narai Meena 10. Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia 11. Shri Jitin Prasad 12. Shri A Sai Prathap 13. Shri Gurudas Kamat
14. Shri M M Pallam Raju 15. Shri Mahadev 16. Shri Harish Rawat 17. Professor K V Thomas 18. Shri Saugata Ray 19. Shri Dinesh Trivedi 20. Shri Sisir Adhikari 21. Shri Sultan Ahmed 22. Shri Mukul Roy 23. Shri Mohan Jatua 24. Shri S S Palanikam 25. Shri D Napoleon 26. Dr S Jagathrakshan	27. Shri S Gandhiselvan 28. Smt Preneet Kaur 29. Shri Sachin Pilot 30. Shri Shashi Tharoor 31. Shri Bharatsinh Solanki 32. Shri Tusharbhavi Chaudhary 33. Shri Arun Yadav 34. Shri Prateek Prakashbapu Patil 35. Shri R P N Singh 36. Shri Vincent Pala 37. Shri Pradeep Jain 38. Ms. Agatha Sangma	Source: Hindustantimes

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 withstand the rigours of political life.

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

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 fit 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.



PHOTO: AFP
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.

Source: Hindustantimes

Nobody in govt to pressurise me

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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 Mashuid.

"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 pressure 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.

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 may cause a disaster

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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 Muzaffar Ahmad.

"Energy cannot be more important than human disaster."

He condemned recent statements by a couple of ministers that the damage would be assessed 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 Taseem Khan, architect Iqbal Habib and Sharif Jamil among others were present.