

Myanmar faces sanctions over Suu Kyi verdict

AFP, Brussels

Criticism poured in for Myanmar yesterday over the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi as the EU promised more sanctions and one of its key regional partners called for the democracy icon's immediate release.

After the authorities ordered the Nobel laureate to remain under house arrest for a further 18 months following a trial in Yangon, protesters rallied outside Myanmar's diplomatic missions to denounce the outcome.

With the sentence effectively ruling out any possibility of the 64-year-old standing in polls next year, there were immediate calls for a hardening of sanctions against the military rulers who prevented Suu Kyi from taking power after her party won elections in 1990.

The EU will respond with additional targeted measures against those responsible for the verdict, "the European Union's Swedish presidency said in a statement on behalf of the 27-nation bloc.

President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso said Suu Kyi's continued detention is "unjustified and unacceptable on all accounts."

An EU source said a "written procedure" had been launched to beef up the sanctions which will be able to come into force on Friday, as long as there is no

opposition from the bloc's members.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said any new EU sanctions had to hit the junta where it hurt.

The new measures "must in particular target the resources that they directly profit from, in the wood and ruby sector," said a statement from his office.

Gordon Brown, prime minister of the former colonial power Britain, said he was "saddened and angry" at the verdict in the "sham trial".

Brown said her "monstrous" prosecution, designed to stop her from taking part in next year's planned elections, meant the poll would have no legitimacy.

The British premier said it was time an arms embargo was slapped on the junta by the UN Security Council, whose permanent members include Myanmar's traditionally China.

Criticism was more muted closer to home but Malaysia's foreign minister said Suu Kyi should be released immediately and called for an urgent meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) regional bloc.

"We were hoping that the junta will release her unconditionally and will hold an election to enable Suu Kyi and other political detainees to participate in that election," Anifah Aman told AFP.

Fellow Asean member Indonesia also expressed

concern, with the foreign ministry saying it was "very disappointed" at the verdict.

Asean had in July rejected US calls to expel Myanmar from the group and opposed sanctions on Myanmar.

Australia also called for tougher sanctions, expressing "dismay" at the conviction and urging the junta to release Suu Kyi in the interests of national reconciliation.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the verdict was a "new low" for the military regime in Myanmar.

"The Australian government is convinced that Aung San Suu Kyi was tried on spurious charges and not granted a fair hearing," he said, adding that sanctions will continue "until we see genuine political change."

In Japan, about 100 activists protested outside Myanmar's embassy.

The demonstrators, many of them refugees from Myanmar, waved portraits of the Nobel laureate and challenged the ambassador to explain the ruling.

Amnesty International meanwhile issued a statement calling the verdict "shameful".

"Her arrest and trial and now this guilty verdict are nothing more than legal and political theatre," said Irene Khan, secretary general of the London-based human rights organisation.

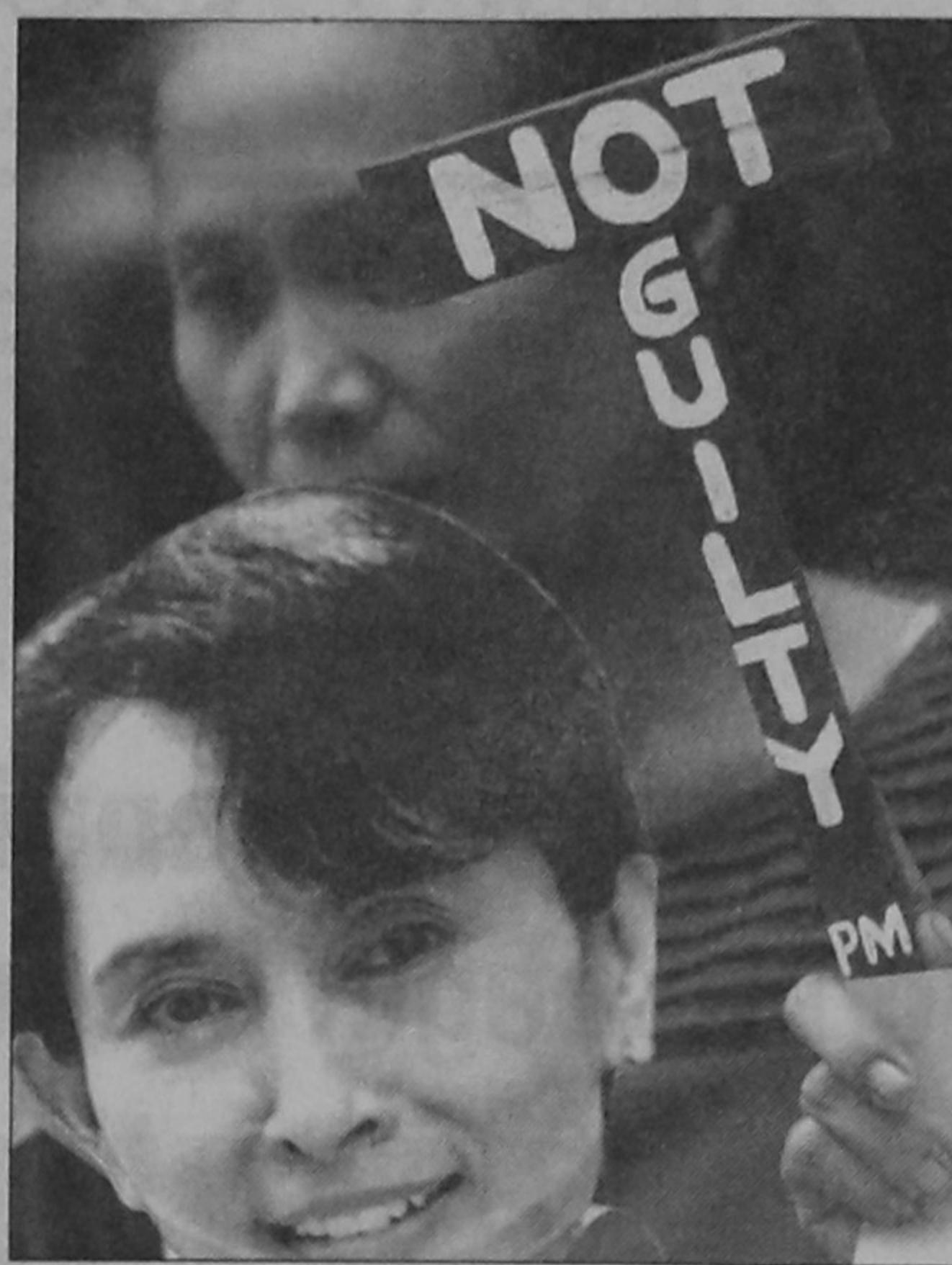


PHOTO: AFP
Activists display a portrait of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi during a protest in front of the Myanmar embassy in Manila yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP
Handout photograph shows Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (C) chatting with a student upon his arrival at a girls' school as Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani (3rd R) looks on in Mingora the capital of troubled Swat Valley on Monday.

Pakistan holds up start of UN nuke talks

AFP, Geneva

Pakistan on Monday held up the resumption of nuclear arms control negotiations at the UN Conference on Disarmament as it asked to reopen a work plan already agreed on by the main nuclear powers.

The Pakistan delegation, which on Friday asked for more time to consult with Islamabad, on Monday said it wanted fresh discussions on procedural questions in a draft text detailing the various heads of negotiating groups and the timetable for the talks.

"I was told by the Pakistan (delegation) that they have received instructions and the instructions are to reopen the text that I

thought we had agreed on," said Caroline Millar, the Australian chairwoman of the conference.

"I'm concerned that the compromise that we have may be put in jeopardy," she added.

Disarmament negotiations have been stalled since 1996 but a thaw in US-Russia relations following Barack Obama's arrival in the White House, and a renewed superpower pledge to back the separate Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, generated fresh momentum.

In May, the nuclear powers agreed to restart talks by agreeing on a work plan for 2009, which would cover the issue of full nuclear disarmament, a ban on fissile material and the arms race in outer space.

PML-Q dares Zardari govt to bring House resolution against Musharraf

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid has challenged the Asif Ali Zardari Government to bring a resolution in Parliament to facilitate the prosecution of former president Pervez Musharraf for violating the constitution.

Speaking in the National Assembly, PML-Q parliamentary leader Faisal Saleh Hayat said the government should gather the courage to try Musharraf through parliament if allegations

of massive corruption and wrongdoings against him were true.

The PML-Q demand came when Parliamentary Affairs Minister Babar Awan denied reports of alleged corruption in government institutions and public sector corporations, saying that real corruption had started during Musharraf's regime.

Newspaper reports and rumours could not be made the basis of allegations of "generalised corruption," Awan contended.



PHOTO: AFP
Pedestrians wade through a flooded street after heavy monsoon rain in Lahore yesterday. Last month at least 26 people, mostly women and children, were killed and hundreds injured after the first torrential rains of the monsoon lashed Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi.

Amnesty slams Suu Kyi conviction as 'shameful' HRW blasts abuse of power

AFP, London/ New York

Amnesty International condemned the conviction of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on Tuesday as "shameful" political theatre and called for her immediate and unconditional release.

"Her arrest and trial and now this guilty verdict are nothing more than legal and political theatre," said Irene Khan, secretary general of the London-based human rights organisation.

Human Rights Watch yesterday also blasted the conviction of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi as a "repentable abuse of power" by the junta and

urged regional allies to press for her release.

"This trial was a farce, a brutal distortion of the legal process," said Brad Adams, Asia director of the New York-based rights group.

"By silencing prominent opponents through bogus trials, the generals are clearly showing why the elections they have been touting for next year won't bring change."

In a statement, Amnesty described the court's decision to convict the Nobel laureate for breaching the terms of her house arrest, following an incident in which a US man swam to her lakeside residence in May, as "shameful".

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