

# Suu Kyi registers party

## Makes first parliament visit

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi registered her opposition party and visited the national parliament for the first time yesterday, as she prepares to enter the mainstream political arena.

The visit in the capital Naypyidaw included a meeting with lower house speaker Shwe Mann, number three in the previous ruling junta and still one of the most powerful men in Myanmar, who said he was "glad" to hold the talks.

"We have to work together as unity is strength," he told reporters.

Suu Kyi, 66, earlier went to the Union Election Commission office to register her National League for Democracy (NLD) party, which must now wait at least a week to be officially endorsed.

"They have signed for their party registration already," a commission official told AFP, referring to Suu Kyi and other senior party members.

The NLD was given the green light from authorities this month to rejoin mainstream politics, paving the way for the Nobel laureate to run for a seat in

the new parliament.

Upper house speaker Khin Aung Myint, who also met Suu Kyi yesterday, described her visit as "auspicious".

"We wanted this to happen a long time ago and we welcome her."

The NLD was stripped of its status as a legal political party by the junta last year after it chose to boycott a rare and controversial election, saying the rules were unfair.

Suu Kyi was released a few days after the November poll, having spent much of the past two decades in detention, and she is now planning to take part in by-elections expected early next year although no polling date has been set.

Since coming to power in March, the new military-backed government dominated by former generals has made a series of reformist moves in an apparent attempt to reach out to political opponents and the West.

These included releasing some of its many political prisoners, suspending construction of an unpopular megadam and holding peace talks with the country's main armed ethnic groups.

Suu Kyi expressed cautious hope

earlier this month that democracy would come to Myanmar, as she welcomed Hillary Clinton to the home in Yangon city that was her prison for years during a landmark visit by the US Secretary of State.

"I am very confident that if we work together... there will be no turning back from the road to democracy," Suu Kyi said at the time.

The NLD won an election in 1990 by a landslide, while Suu Kyi remained under house arrest, but the ruling generals never allowed the party to take power.

Last week the party said it had chosen the image of a fighting peacock gazing at a white star as its new symbol, replacing its trademark bamboo hat.

The NLD refused to participate in that vote -- the first in two decades -- mainly because of rules that would have forced it to expel imprisoned members.

An amendment to a law on political parties has since removed the contentious clause that said prisoners could not be party members, as well as a condition that all parties must agree to "preserve" a controversial 2008 constitution.



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi (L) receives a gift from speaker of the lower house Thura Shwe Mann during their meeting at the lower house parliament office in Naypyidaw yesterday.

## 16 killed in violence in Mexico

AFP, Veracruz

Sixteen people were killed when gunmen attacked three buses in the eastern coastal state of Veracruz state as millions of Mexicans headed home for their Christmas holidays.

Gunmen killed four people before attacking three buses killing seven others, said state government spokeswoman Gina Dominguez on Thursday, in what local media said began as a robbery spree. Military soldiers deployed to the scene killed five gunmen, officials said.

The killings came a day after the Mexican Navy announced it was taking over security in the busy port of Veracruz, highlighting the military's role in cracking down on the country's violent crime activities in the region.

### ROW OVER GENOCIDE

# Turkey hits back at France

AFP, Istanbul

The war of words between France and Turkey escalated dramatically yesterday, when the Turkish premier accused Paris of committing genocide in Algeria and of stirring hatred of Muslims.

Furious that French lawmakers had voted on Thursday to outlaw denial of the 1915 Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit back directly at France's President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Earlier, Turkey's ambassador to France had left Paris and Ankara had announced diplomatic sanctions -- banning political visits between the countries -- and frozen military ties between the nominal NATO allies.

"France massacred an estimated 15 per cent of the Algerian population starting from 1945. This is genocide," Erdogan told reporters, accusing Sarkozy of "fanning hatred of



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Muslims and Turks for electoral gains."

"This vote that took place in France, a France in which five million Muslims live, clearly shows to what point racism, discrimination and Islamophobia have reached dangerous levels in France and Europe," he said.

Paris appeared to have been caught off guard by the fury of Turkey's response. Sarkozy, in Prague where he was at the funeral of late Czech president Vaclav Havel, was on the defensive.

"I respect the views of our Turkish friends -- it's a great country, a great civilisation -- and they must respect ours," he said.

"France does not lecture anyone but France doesn't want to be lectured. France decides its policy as a sovereign nation. We do not ask for permission. France has its beliefs, human rights, a respect for memory."

## Egyptians gather for rally against army

AFP, Cairo

Hundreds gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square ahead of a planned mass rally yesterday against the ruling military, which sparked outrage when its soldiers were taped beating women protesters.

Activists and political parties called for the demonstration after days of deadly clashes with soldiers last week left at least 17 people dead and many more wounded, including a woman hospitalised after a savage beating by soldiers.

Supporters of the military, which took power after an uprising ousted veteran president Hosni Mubarak in February, planned a counter-rally in the Abbasiya neighbourhood, several kilometres (a few miles) away.

# Hazare to fast in jail if no venue given in Mumbai

PTI, Ralegan Siddhi

Anna Hazare yesterday said he will fast in jail if authorities fail to give him a venue in Mumbai to protest against a "weak" Lokpal Bill.

"They will keep creating hurdles. In August, they did not give me a venue till last minute. I had to fast in jail... this time also, if they don't give me venue, I will go to jail," he told reporters.

He was responding to questions on his proposed fast from December 27.

Meanwhile, Mumbai High Court yesterday said it can't allow "parallel canvassing" when Parliament is seized with debate on Lokpal Bill and questioned Team Anna's decision to seek exemption from charges to use MMRDA grounds for Anna Hazare's proposed fast.

The court refused to interfere in the matter, saying it cannot ask government authorities (the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) to grant them exemption.



His supporters have approached Bombay High Court seeking direction to the State government to allot a place for the protest.

Slamming the new Lokpal Bill, he said the government should involve people in law-making and invoked former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's

name to tell the Congress-led dispensation that he had written to all village heads before coming out with the Panchayati Raj Bill. Hazare questioned as to why the government was drafting the Bill alone.

"Why is it so? Why does it not take the advice of the people? People are the masters and they have sent MPs to serve them. So they have to listen to people. Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi understood this."

"He wrote to the sarpanchs in all the 5.5 lakh villages in the country on the 73rd and 74th amendment. You cannot do it on your whims and fancies. Then what is the difference between autocracy and democracy?" he told reporters in Ralegan Siddhi.

# NEWS IN brief

## New Zealand's Christchurch rocked by earthquakes

BBC ONLINE

A series of earthquakes has shaken the New Zealand city of Christchurch, sending residents rushing from buildings and causing minor damage.

The first 5.8 quake struck at 1358 local time, the US Geological Survey said. Another of similar magnitude hit 80 minutes later.

Dozens of people suffered minor injuries but only 19 were admitted to hospital.

It comes 10 months after swathes of the city were destroyed by another quake.

Yesterday's first earthquake struck 26km (16 miles) north-east of the city at a depth of 4.7km. The second large event, with a magnitude estimated at 5.9, was in

## 1,000 missing in Philippine floods: govt

AFP, Cagayan De Oro

More than 1,000 people remain missing in the Philippines after devastating floods that have already left more than 1,000 others confirmed dead, the government said yesterday.

The latest toll stood at 1,079 missing, up from 51, and 1,080 dead, up from 1,010.

The big jump in the missing came as rural families reported large numbers of relatives had gone to work in hard-hit southern cities and remained unaccounted for, civil defence official Ana Caneda told AFP.

"There are whole families who have gone missing or who died. No one inquired about them before,"

## Russian satellite falls back to Earth after launch

AFP, Moscow

A Russian satellite fell back to Earth over Siberia after its launch yesterday, in the latest setback for Russia's space programme following a string of failures in the last year.

"The satellite failed to go into its orbit. A state commission will investigate the causes of the accident," the spokesman of Russia's space forces Alexei Zolotukhin told the Interfax news agency.

The Meridian communications satellite "fell to the territory of Siberia" after its launch from the Plesetsk cosmodrome due to a third stage rocket failure, the Interfax news agency said, quoting a space industry



PHOTO: AFP

An elephant dressed in a Santa Claus costume gives a toy to students ahead of the Christmas festival at a school in Ayutthaya province yesterday. The event was held as part of a campaign to promote Christmas in Thailand.

## World leaders attend Havel's funeral

AFP, Prague

World leaders gathered in Prague yesterday for the funeral of Czech Velvet Revolution hero Vaclav Havel, who died on Sunday at the age of 75.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister David Cameron and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her husband, former President Bill Clinton joined leaders from more than a dozen countries in the historic St Vitus' Cathedral.

The republic's 10.5 million population was to observe a minute's silence at noon expected to stop traffic and work in many places.

Havel led his nation through the bloodless 1989 Velvet Revolution that toppled Soviet-backed communism in then-Czechoslovakia.

# Elephant's sixth 'toe' discovered

BBC ONLINE

A mysterious bony growth found in elephants' feet is actually a sixth "toe", scientists report.

For more than 300 years, the structure has puzzled researchers, but this study suggests that it helps to support elephants' colossal weight.

Fossils reveal that this "pre-digit" evolved about 40 million years ago, at a point when early elephants became larger and more land-based.

The research is published in the journal Science.

Lead author Professor John Hutchinson, from the UK's structure and motion laboratory at the Royal Veterinary College, said: "It's a cool mystery that goes back to 1706, when the first elephant was dissected by a Scottish surgeon."

Many people, he said, thought that the structure was a huge lump of cartilage, and over the years its purpose or lack of purpose has been debated.

"Anyone who has studied elephants' feet has wondered about it. They've thought: 'Huh, that's weird,' and then moved on," he added.

But Prof Hutchinson and colleagues used a combination of CT scans, histology, dissection and electron microscopy to solve the puzzle. The researchers said the structure was made of bone, although bone with a highly irregular and unusual arrangement.

But closer examination also revealed that it showed a strong similarity with an unusual bone that is found in the front feet of pandas.

## HELP FOR HOOCHMAKERS Mamata's govt mulls a safety scheme

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In the backdrop of the worst hooch tragedy in India's Paschimbanga state that left 170 people dead two weeks ago, the state government yesterday said it has decided on a social safety security scheme to help poor makers and vendors of country liquor to switch over to some other trade.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee told media persons here that "we have decided to work out a social security scheme so that the poor people who brew and vend country liquor can switch over to some trade".

She said the details of the scheme, which was discussed at her meeting with senior state officials here, would be worked out and made public later.

Mamata's remarks came a day after she announced that she would lead a street march here on December 30 to campaign against contaminated liquor.

She had said on Thursday that the rally would see participation of people drawn from different walks of life.

The hooch that had struck Sangrampur and adjoining villages in the state's South 24 Parganas district on December 13-14 left 170 people in one of the worst hooch tragedies of India.

## Malaysian MP jailed over graft

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

A powerful lawmaker from Prime Minister Najib Razak's ruling party was convicted by a Malaysian court yesterday of corruption and sentenced to a year in jail.

Najib came to power in 2009 with a pledge to tackle corruption which is endemic in Malaysian politics and society.

High Court Judge Wira Mohtarudin Baki found Mohamad Khir Toyo -- a former chief minister of central Selangor state -- guilty of abusing his position to buy land in 2007. He also ordered the confiscation of Balinese-style mansion.

"Only a fine is not enough in this case ... the (former) head of a state deserves a jail sentence. Hence the court orders a 12 month jail term from today," he was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency.