

She was always going to disappoint

As West never scrutinised the 'heroine for humanity', Suu Kyi's fall from grace was only a matter of time

CNN ONLINE

Few people have risen so high in the international imagination only to fall as dramatically as Aung San Suu Kyi.

In 2013, after the Nobel Peace Prize laureate was released from house arrest in Myanmar, as the military regime gradually liberalized in the face of punishing international sanctions, Suu Kyi was hailed in the British parliament as a "conscience of a country and a heroine for humanity."

Two years later, as she celebrated victory for her National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar's first free elections in decades, the moment seemed to solidify her place in history as Asia's Nelson Mandela.

This week, the "heroine for humanity" appeared at the Hague to defend her country -- and by extension herself -- from accusations of genocide against Rohingya Muslims, hundreds of thousands

of whom have been forced out of northwestern Myanmar by a years-long military crackdown.

Many of the problems that Suu Kyi inherited in 2015 were put in place long before the country gained independence from Britain.

Myanmar's colonial rulers -- as they did throughout the world -- played ethnic groups against each other, boosting the Christian Karen and other non-Buddhist minorities and importing large numbers of Indian and Chinese workers.

Though Suu Kyi's father, independence leader General Aung San, succeeded in uniting Shan, Chin and Kachin groups with his Burmese nationalists, hardline Communists and Karen separatists soon launched insurgencies against the newly independent state.

"The need to keep the rebels in check made the army strong," Suu Kyi wrote in a 1985 history of the country. Over the next five decades of military rule, Suu Kyi emerged as a leading opposition figure, boosted by her impeccable heritage and her strong international ties. She was the epitome of democracy to the western leaders and media.

Few mythical figures survive intense scrutiny, and Suu Kyi perhaps more



than anyone has fallen short of her public image. Her numerous flaws that were once ignored have now come to the surface. These include, according to numerous critics, a tendency to megalomania and authoritarianism, as well as an anti-Muslim bias that had been an open secret for years before the current crisis.

As Francis Wade writes in "Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other," even before the latest crisis "Suu Kyi was often accused of harboring a possible (anti-Muslim) bias of her own, for she was an elite Bamar and thus a beneficiary of the ethnic hierarchy that had formed in Myanmar."

She notoriously dismissed concerns about rising violence against Rohingya in a 2013 interview, saying Buddhists in Rakhine live in fear of "global Muslim power."

Had she offered even tacit criticism of the military as it launched its campaign of ethnic cleansing in 2016, her international reputation might have survived. She could have justifiably pointed to the limits of her own power and that of the NLD, and the need for Myanmar to undergo a full democratization that would finally remove the military from power.

Instead however, she focused on shoring up electoral support back home, where the anti-Rohingya campaign remains popular, and

backed the military, often speaking in the language of conspiracy and paranoia. In 2017, Suu Kyi claimed during a phone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that a "huge iceberg of misinformation" about the Rohingya crisis was being distributed to benefit "terrorists." According to a readout of the call, she said her government was fighting to ensure "terrorism" didn't spread over the whole of Rakhine state.

Speaking last year, former US ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson, who has known Suu Kyi for over 30 years and visited her during her lengthy period of house arrest, said she had "changed, she's become, unfortunately, a politician afraid of the military and afraid to make the tough decisions to resolve one of the worst humanitarian crises in history."

Perhaps she has changed. Or perhaps she simply never was the person she was presented as, but instead a far more flawed figure, who, faced with an intensely difficult balancing act, chose to follow the path of least resistance and shore up majority support while sacrificing a loathed minority. She was hardly the first leader to do so, and likely will not be the last.



J&K leader Farooq Abdullah's detention extended again

National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah's detention under the stringent Public Safety Act or PSA has been extended by three months. The three-term chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir will continue to remain at his house in Srinagar that has been declared a sub-jail. Farooq Abdullah has been under detention since August 5, when the India announced the end of special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and split the state into two union territories. Under the Public Safety Act, a person can be under detention without trial for up to two years. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee criticised the move on Twitter and called it "unconstitutional". This is was first time that this law has been used on a mainstream politician. Usually, it has been used to arrest terrorists, separatists.

Sudan's Bashir gets two years' detention for graft

A Sudanese court yesterday ordered former president Omar al-Bashir to be detained for two years in a correctional centre for corruption in one of several cases against the ousted autocrat. Bashir, who was toppled by the army in April after months of mass demonstrations, was convicted of graft and "possession of foreign currency", judge Al Sadiq Abdelrahman said. The court ordered the 75-year-old to serve two years in a correctional centre for the elderly. "Under the law, those who reached the age of 70 shall not serve jail terms," the judge said. The court also ordered the confiscation of 6.9 million euros, \$351,770 and 5.7 million Sudanese pounds (\$128,000) found at Bashir's home. The ex-president will appeal the verdict, said one of his lawyers, Ahmed Ibrahim.

US state Ohio declares cyberattack emergency

New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell declared a state of emergency Friday after the city was hit by a cyberattack. Phishing attempts and suspicious activity were detected on the city's network around 5:00 am. By 11:00 am, technician investigators detected "a cybersecurity incident" and the city's information technology department began powering down servers and city computers as a precaution, the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness said in a series of tweets. While ransomware was detected, no ransom has been demanded in the cyberattack, Cantrell said. In July, several school systems in Louisiana were attacked by malware, prompting the governor to issue a state of emergency.

SOURCE: AFP, CNN, NDTV

REALITY CHECK FOR JOHNSON'S BREXIT

IT'S JUST THE BEGINNING

REUTERS, Brussels

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson won a sweeping election victory on a promise to "Get Brexit done", but a reality check awaits for voters hoping that the messy divorce is finally over. It's just the beginning.

Johnson should now be able to secure parliamentary approval for the withdrawal deal he struck with the European Union in October so Brexit happens on Jan 31.

Britain then goes into a transition period until the end of 2020. Time enough, says Johnson, to negotiate a new relationship with the EU, including on trade.

But EU diplomats and officials say there could be many potholes along the way, and Britain could still find itself at the cliff edge of a no-deal exit one year from now.

The EU hopes to start trade talks with Britain by March, leaving just 10 months to strike a deal and get it approved by London and the EU, including member states' parliaments.

The transition period can be prolonged by one or two years but London must request an extension by the end of June.

With a large parliamentary majority, Johnson may pay less heed to hardline Brexiteers in his party than he did before the election and renege on his pre-election pledge



not to extend the transition period beyond 2020.

If Johnson fails to reach an agreement with the EU by the end of next year, and he refuses to negotiate past his own deadline, then the legal default would be a no-deal divorce.

EU officials point out that the end-June deadline for extending

the transition would not be easy to push back.

If Britain were to stay in the transition period beyond 2020, it would require a financial settlement as the EU enters its new 2021-27 budget. London would be reluctant to keep on contributing to EU coffers so that discussion would be tricky.

The EU insists it will not seal a trade deal with a large, economically powerful neighbour without solid provisions to guarantee fair competition.

The EU's demands will focus on environmental and labour standards, as well as state aid rules to ensure Britain would not be able to offer products on the bloc's single market at unfairly low prices.

Britain's conundrum is that it will be under pressure to loosen rules on agricultural and food standards to strike a bilateral trade deal with the United States. But this would be crossing a red line for the EU, which would restrict access to its market to protect its own producers.

N Korea conducts 'crucial test' at Sohae launch site

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has conducted another "crucial test" at its Sohae satellite launch site, state media reported yesterday, as nuclear negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington remain stalled with a deadline approaching.

The announcement comes a day before US Special Envoy on North Korea Stephen Biegun is set to arrive in Seoul for a three-day visit, and after the United States tested a medium-range ballistic missile over the Pacific Ocean on Thursday.

"Another crucial test was successfully conducted at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground from 22:41 to 22:48 on December 13," a spokesman for the North's National Academy of Defence Science said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency.

The "research successes" will be "applied to further bolstering up the reliable strategic nuclear deterrent" of North Korea, the spokesman added. The statement did not provide further details on the test.

Soha, on North Korea's northwest coast, is ostensibly a facility designed for putting satellites into orbit. But Pyongyang has carried out several rocket launches there that were condemned by the US and others as disguised long-range ballistic missile tests.

The North is banned from firing ballistic missiles under UN Security Council resolutions, and rocket engines can be easily repurposed for use in missiles.

Frustrated by the lack of sanctions relief after three summits with President Donald Trump, North Korea has vowed an ominous "Christmas gift" if the US does not come up with concessions by the end of the year.

NEWSIN brief

Three killed in Nepal bomb blast

AFP, Kathmandu

Three people, including a police official, were killed when a bomb exploded in southern Nepal early yesterday. The device detonated outside a local residence after the owner called the police to report a suspicious object on his premises in Dhanusha district. Senior police official Pradhumna Karki said that two more members of the family and another police officer were also injured and are undergoing treatment. "We are investigating the case, no one has claimed its responsibility yet," he said.

17 killed in DR Congo attacks

AFP, Bunia

Seventeen people have died in three attacks in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo hit by chronic unrest, the army and local observers said Friday. Two of the attacks in Ituri province were attributed to the Codeco militia that has also been accused of a civilian massacre in June.

9 Afghan forces killed in insider attack

AFP, Ghazni

The Taliban have killed nine Afghan soldiers in an insider attack in central Afghanistan's Ghazni province, the military said yesterday, underscoring the dangers Afghan forces face from within their own ranks. Defence ministry spokesman Fawad Aman later told AFP the troops had been killed by Taliban infiltrators. Such attacks, sometimes referred to as "green on green," are a constant threat in the war-torn country for international and Afghan forces alike.



(From left, clockwise) Protesters clash with police during a demonstration against the Indian government's Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in Howrah, on the outskirts of Kolkata, yesterday; Indian left wing activists shout slogans as they burn an effigy of India's Home Minister Amit Shah in Siliguri; and Assamese residents of Bangalore hold placards and shout slogans against the Act in Bangalore.



PHOTO: AFP

US SC to hear Trump tax return cases next year

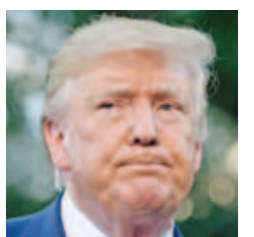
AFP, Washington

The US Supreme Court agreed Friday to hear cases next year involving the release of President Donald Trump's tax returns and financial records, setting the stage for a potential blockbuster ruling during the presidential election campaign.

Trump has been seeking to block access to his tax returns and other records in cases brought by New York prosecutors and Democratic-controlled committees in the House of Representatives.

Lower courts have ruled that Trump must turn over the documents, but lawyers for the president appealed to the nation's highest court, arguing that as chief executive, he has blanket immunity.

"We are pleased that the Supreme Court granted review of the president's three pending cases," Jay Sekulow, Trump's personal



attorney, said in a statement. "These cases raise significant constitutional issues."

"We look forward to presenting our written and oral arguments."

The Supreme Court -- where conservative judges are in the majority -- said it will hear arguments in March with a decision to be issued before the court session ends June 30.

A Supreme Court ruling in the case would come less than six months before Americans go to the polls in November. Trump is the first US president since Richard Nixon not to make his tax returns public, claiming they are under audit by the Internal Revenue Service.

2020 'year of action' against climate change

AFP, Turin

Environmental activist Greta Thunberg urged young people in Italy on Friday to seize the next decade to fight climate change, and chastised world leaders for acting "as if there is no tomorrow".

The Swedish 16-year-old -- who this week was named Time magazine's 2019 Person of the Year -- reminded young activists at the "Fridays for Future" rally in the northern Italian city of Turin to make 2020 a "year of action".

"In less than three weeks we will move into a new decade and... I cannot say enough how important this decade will be," said Thunberg, bundled up against the cold in a yellow rain slicker.

"This is a decade that will define our future."

Thunberg slammed world leaders currently attending the UN Climate Change Conference in Madrid, saying they

were "still trying to run away from their responsibilities".

"It is not fair that the old generations are handing over the responsibility to solve this crisis to the young people who have not started this crisis. It is not fair that we have to do all this," she said.

"The adults are behaving as if there is no tomorrow," Thunberg said, cautioning that youth can "no longer take that tomorrow for granted."

The teenager rose to the global stage after launching a solo strike against global warming in mid-2018 which surged into a worldwide movement that has seen her tipped as a Nobel laureate.

In naming her Person of the Year, Time magazine wrote that Thunberg "has offered a moral clarion call to those who are willing to act, and hurled shame on those who are not."



US sanctions on Iran violate international law

Says Malaysian PM, hints he could stay on beyond 2020

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran violate the United Nations' charter and international law, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said in a conference in Qatar.

"Malaysia does not support the reimposition of the unilateral sanctions by the US against Iran," he told the Doha Forum, also attended by Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, yesterday.

Last year, US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the 2015 Iran nuclear accord and reinstated sanctions to choke Iran's oil exports and isolate its economy as part of a "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran to force it to renegotiate a new deal.

Malaysia and other countries have lost "a big market" because of the sanctions on Iran, said Mahathir.

"Such sanctions clearly violate the United Nations Charter and international law. Sanctions can only be applied by the United Nations in accordance with the charter," he added.

The 93-year-old Malaysian leader also suggested he may seek to stay in power beyond 2020. Asked if he would step down in 2020, he said he wanted to fix problems created by the previous government before resigning. He also said he could not guarantee who would succeed him as prime minister.

Mahathir promised on December 10 to hand over power to his anointed successor Anwar Ibrahim in 2020, in spite of new sexual assault allegations against him.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday warned Iran of a "decisive" response if US interests are harmed in Iraq, after a series of rocket attacks on bases.

