



## Reading

# Suu Kyi too hot for Asia's most brutal regime to handle

By Peter Popham

*Sunday, 7 November 2010*

She is by some stretch the most abused political heroine alive today. She has been confined to her crumbling family home in Rangoon for more than 15 of the past 20 years. Her two sons, Alex and Kim, have for many years been barred from visiting her – Kim, now 33, is in Bangkok trying to get a visa so he can see his mother for the first time in 10 years. The last wish of her gravely ill husband, Michael Aris – to die in her arms – was brutally snubbed.

But in one week's time all that could be in the past and Aung San Suu Kyi could walk through the rusty iron gates of 54 University Avenue, Rangoon, a free woman again.

Or will she?

It was Burma's dictator, Senior General Than Shwe, in person who decreed that Ms Suu Kyi should be released on 13 November. Back in May 2009 she was sentenced to three years' house arrest for allowing an American religious fanatic, John Yettaw, who had swum across Inya Lake to see her, to stay overnight in her house. But after sentence was passed, a messenger from the Senior General burst into the courtroom to announce that, in his great mercy, he was cutting the sentence in half, to 18 months.

But that was then, when new elections were merely a vague commitment. Now that the date has nearly arrived, nothing is sure.

Last week, as the Burmese prepared to vote for the first time since they gave Ms Suu Kyi's party a landslide victory 20 years ago, tensions were mounting. Battle-tested troops, identified by their red bandanas and much feared because of their murderous role in suppressing protests in the past, were posted along major roads in the former capital. Trucks packed with navy-blue-uniformed Lon Thein riot police were seen moving around. Clubs and restaurants closed early amid rumours of an impending declaration of martial law.

Foreign journalists have been banned from Burma, with the rarest of exceptions, ever since the coup of 1962. Whenever news broke since then, they have been entering the country as tourists and doing their job as best they could.



Which prompts a question: if the modest reporting endeavours of a handful of foreigners are such a problem for the junta, how will it cope with the Lady when she gets behind a microphone again – the one person in the country capable, with a few well-chosen words, of galvanising not only millions of her own people but the leaders of the free world as well?

A sweeping victory in the election for the junta's two proxy parties is a foregone conclusion – they have far more candidates than any of the other parties, far more money, and in dozens of seats are standing unopposed. One can speculate that a thumping win for the generals' friends would make them more relaxed about having Ms Suu Kyi at large again. But even so, the omens for her release are not good.

Imprisoned opposition journalist U Win Tin admits that the future is too dark to read. "The military power in Burma is so big you cannot predict what will happen," he told me. "The regime is afraid of her popularity. That's why there is political deadlock. The only thing we can say is that we have faith, and a good leader, and although we have been dissolved we are not going to go away. But nobody can tell what will happen."

### Key Vocabulary

1. commitment-(n) - A promise or oath to do something.
2. proxy-(n) - A person given authority to act for another.
3. speculate-(v) - To imagine and guess.
4. bar-(v) - To block or prevent.
5. ban-(v) - Make a rule or law against something.
6. cope-(v) - Solve or accept a problem or difficulty.
7. handful-(n) - A small number.
8. sentence-(n) - A punishment.
9. coup-(n) - A quick and successful action. Often used for taking over a government.

### Summary Writing

Write a summary of the article, including only the main points. Try to use your own words as far as possible. Write no more than 100 words.

### Vocabulary check

Complete the sentences below with one of the words from "key vocabulary" above. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. She only has a \_\_\_\_\_ of friends in this city.
2. You must \_\_\_\_\_ with many new problems when you move to a new country.
3. An army \_\_\_\_\_ ended the democratic government.



4. He received a \_\_\_\_\_ of 3 years in prison.
5. Smoking is \_\_\_\_\_ from theatres and cinemas.
6. My father is my medical \_\_\_\_\_ if I cannot speak for myself.
7. Marriage is a big \_\_\_\_\_ and you should probably wait until you're older.
8. He was \_\_\_\_\_ from entering the burning building by the firefighters.
9. People \_\_\_\_\_ that the old cow might have been stolen by UFO's.

### Answer Key

### Example Summary

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Burma's opposition, who has been in prison for the best part of the last two decades may be released next week. However, when her sentence was reduced the military junta had not fixed a definite date for elections, and now that they are imminent they may be too scared of her popularity to release her. Although the elections will be rigged to ensure the victory of the junta, they are still worried about her potential to stir up popular unrest.

### Vocabulary

1. handful
2. cope
3. coup
4. sentence
5. banned
6. proxy
7. commitment
8. barred
9. speculate