

**AUNG SAN SUU KYI** (RECIPIENT, NOBEL PEACE PRIZE 1991)June 19, 1945 – Present (*Under house arrest*)**1945****June 19**

Aung San Suu Kyi born in Rangoon, the third child in family. Her name comprised “Aung San” for father, “Kyi” for mother, and “Suu” for grandmother, also reflecting the day of the week of her birth.

**1947****July 19**

General Aung San assassinated. Suu Kyi is two years old. Daw Khin Kyi becomes a prominent public figure, heading social planning and social policy bodies.

**1948****January 4**

The Independent Union of Burma is established.

**1960**

Daw Khin Kyi appointed Burma’s ambassador to India. Suu Kyi accompanies mother to New Delhi.

**1960–64**

Suu Kyi at high school and Lady Shri Ram College in New Delhi.

**1964–67**

Oxford University, B.A. in philosophy, politics and economics at St. Hugh’s College (elected Honorary Fellow, 1990). British “parents” are Lord Gore-Booth, former British ambassador to Burma and High Commissioner in India, and his wife, at whose home Suu Kyi meets Michael Aris, student of Tibetan civilisation.



**“WHEN I HONOUR MY FATHER, I HONOUR THOSE WHO STAND FOR POLITICAL INTEGRITY IN BURMA”**

*Aung San Suu Kyi*

# Changing the course OF MYANMAR’S FUTURE

by JEAN QINGWEN LOO

As **Maemae Myint** entered a makeshift dining room at the back of the Burmese Buddhist Temple on Ah Hood Road in Singapore, her eyes were drawn to the striking banner of Aung San Suu Kyi hanging proudly in the distance.

“That is a very nice picture of our lady,” said the 34-year-old tour guide, who was in town with her family from Yangon. “I am glad to be here today and be free to pray for her with everyone.”

She joined the crowd queuing up for their free bowls of Mhingga or rice vermicelli in fish soup. They had all gathered for the same purpose – to pray for Suu Kyi, Myanmar’s imprisoned democracy leader, who had just turned 64.

▲ Aung San, his wife and children. Aung San Suu Kyi is in the foreground.

► National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Aung San Suu Kyi, outside, with a pin flag of the star and peacock, symbol of the opposition movement.



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### 1969–71

She goes to New York for graduate study, staying with family friend Ma Than E, staff member at the United Nations, where U Thant of Burma is Secretary-General. Postponing studies, Suu Kyi joins U.N. secretariat as Assistant Secretary, Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. Evenings and weekends volunteers at hospital, helping indigent patients in programs of reading and companionship.

### 1972

**January 1**  
Marries Michael Aris, joins him in Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, where he tutors royal family and heads Translation Department. She becomes Research Officer in the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### 1973

They return to England for birth of Alexander in London.

### 1974

Michael assumes appointment in Tibetan and Himalayan studies at Oxford University.

### 1977

Birth of second son, Kim at Oxford. While raising her children, Suu Kyi begins writing, researches for biography of father, and assists Michael in Himalayan studies.

### 1984

Publishes *Aung San* in Leaders of Asia series by University of Queensland Press.

(See *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 3–38.)

### 1985–86

For juvenile readers publishes *Let's Visit Burma*, also books on Nepal and Bhutan in same series for Burke Publishing Company, London.

Visiting Scholar, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, researching father's time in Japan. Kim with her, Alexander with Michael, who has fellowship at Indian Institute of Advanced Studies at Simla in northern India.

### 1987

With fellowship at Indian Institute Suu Kyi, with Kim, joins Michael and Alexander in Simla. Travels to London when mother is there for cataract surgery. Publishes *Socio-Political Currents in Burmese Literature, 1910–1940* in journal of Tokyo University. (See *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 140–164.) September. Family returns to Oxford. Suu Kyi enrolls at London School of Oriental and African Studies to work on advanced degree.

### 1988

**March 31**  
Informed by telephone of mother's severe stroke, she takes plane next day to Rangoon to help care for Daw Khin Kyi at hospital, then moves her to family home on University Avenue next to Inya Lake in Rangoon.

### July 23

Resignation of General Ne Win, since 1962 military dictator of Burma. Popular demonstrations of protest continuing.

### August 8/8/88

Mass uprising throughout country. Violent suppression by military kills thousands.

### August 15

Suu Kyi, in first political action, sends open letter to government, asking for formation of independent consultative committee to prepare multi-party elections.

### August 26

In first public speech, she addresses several hundred thousand people outside Shwedagon Pagoda, calling for democratic government. Michael and her two sons are there.

### September 18

Military establishes State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Political gatherings of more than four persons banned. Arrests and sentencing without trial reaffirmed. Parliamentary elections to be held, but in expectation that multiplicity of parties will prevent a clear result.

### September 24

National League for Democracy (NLD) formed, with Suu Kyi general-secretary. Policy of non-violence and civil disobedience.

### October-December

Defying ban, Suu Kyi makes speech-making tour throughout country to large audiences.

### December 27

Daw Khin Kyi dies at age of 76.

### 1989

#### January 2

Funeral of Daw Khin Kyi. Huge funeral procession. Suu Kyi vows that as her father and mother had served the people of Burma, so too would she, even unto death.

#### January–July

Suu Kyi continues campaign despite harassment, arrests and killings by soldiers.

#### February 17

Suu Kyi prohibited from standing for election.

#### April 5

Incident in Irawaddy Delta when Suu Kyi courageously walks toward rifles soldiers are aiming at her.

#### July 20

Suu Kyi placed under house arrest, without charge or trial. Sons already with her. Michael flies to Rangoon, finds her on third day of hunger strike, asking to be sent to prison to join students arrested at her home. Ends strike when good treatment of students is promised.

## Power of the powerless?

For 14 of the last 20 years, Suu Kyi has been placed under house arrest on numerous occasions. Disallowed contact with the outside world, she would busy herself reading, meditating and playing the piano. In recent times, she has been permitted to meet foreign diplomats like United Nations special envoy Ibrahim Gambari.

During this time, her efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar and sacrifice of her personal life and freedom won her support and recognition from all over the world, earning her the Nobel Peace Prize (1991) and the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (1990), which her sons accepted on her behalf.

Although she was offered the freedom to leave Myanmar on several occasions, Suu Kyi refused for fear of permanent exile. In March 1999, after several failed petitions to the Burmese authorities to visit his wife for the last time, Michael Aris died of prostate cancer in London. The last of the five times they had met since she began house arrest was at Christmas, four years ago.

“Over the years, her personal sacrifice and stoicism has stood in stark contrast to the opulent lifestyles of the military leadership,” says Dr Jason Abbott, an expert on Myanmar from Britain's University of Surrey. “It is arguable that without Suu Kyi's international fame and notoriety, the regime would have long since dispensed with her.”



▲ August 7, 2007: A Burmese protestor holds up a poster of pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi during a protest in front of the Myanmar embassy in downtown Kuala Lumpur.



◀ Myanmar pro-democracy activists hold placards during a rally against the country's military junta near the Myanmar embassy in Seoul on August 8, 2009. A group of some 30 activists demanding the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate release, staged a protest to mark the 21st anniversary of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, which ended in a massacre by Myanmar government troops.

Her last public appearance was in 2007 at the gate of her home to receive blessings from Buddhist monks who were marching in support of human rights. In May this year, as her latest detention period was about to expire, the untimely intrusion of John Yettaw resulted otherwise.

## Crack of dawn?

With both the junta and Suu Kyi sticking firmly to their guns, it seems that the way forward would depend on how they react to engagement with the West, and persuasion from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a 10-nation organisation, which Myanmar is part of.

Dr Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, thinks it is very clear that the priority of the Burmese government lies in its maintenance of political power.



▲ Myanmar policemen stand guard by a shed outside opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's house in Yangon on August 11, 2009, after the democracy icon was driven back to her house under tight security.

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Source: nobelprize.org

### 1990

May 27

Despite detention of Suu Kyi, NLD wins election with 82% of parliamentary seats. SLORC refuses to recognise results.

October 12

Suu Kyi granted 1990 Rafto Human Rights Prize.

### 1991

July 10

European Parliament awards Suu Kyi Sakharov human rights prize.

October 14

Norwegian Nobel Committee announces Suu Kyi is winner of 1991 Peace Prize.

December

*Freedom from Fear* published by Penguin in New York, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Also in Norwegian, French, Spanish translations.

December 10

Alexander and Kim accept prize for mother in Oslo ceremony. Suu Kyi remains in detention, having rejected offer to free her if she will leave Burma and withdraw from politics. Worldwide appeal growing for her release.

### 1992

Suu Kyi announces that she will use \$1.3 million prize money to establish health and education trust for Burmese people.

### 1993

Group of Nobel Peace Laureates, denied entry to Burma, visit Burmese refugees on Thailand border, and call for Suu Kyi's release. Their appeal later repeated at UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

### 1994

February

First non-family visitors to Suu Kyi: UN representative, US congressman, *New York Times* reporter.

September–October

SLORC leaders meet with Suu Kyi, who still asks for a public dialogue.

### 1995

July 10

SLORC releases Suu Kyi from house arrest after six years of detention.

### 1996–2009

Suu Kyi is tehrn returned to house arrest after a few month of freedom. From here on, she serves out her time under another period of house arrest.

### 2009

May

Shortly before her most recent sentence was to be completed, Suu Kyi was arrested and charged with breaching the terms of her house arrest after an intruder (a US citizen) entered her house compound.

August 11

A criminal court inside Insein prison in Rangoon sentenced Suu Kyi to 3 years of imprisonment for violating her order for house arrest, with the sentence reduced to 18 months, to be served under house arrest.

A widespread belief, within and outside of Myanmar, that this latest conviction was designed to prevent Suu Kyi from participating in multi-party elections scheduled for 2010.

“Letting Suu Kyi participate in the upcoming elections risks the regime losing power so they have every reason to continue to lock her up,” he says. “After all, Myanmar has shown that it has been able to manage its domestic politics without any restraint all these years.”

Furthermore, the growing strength of Suu Kyi's popularity over the last two decades of her house arrest and the lack of a succession in the NLD party has made her even more indispensable in Myanmar's political struggle.

Others caution on tying the political crisis in Burma too closely with Suu Kyi alone and see another possible way out beyond hard sanctions and boycotts.

ASEAN and the West should instead explore new avenues of connection with a paranoid military leadership defined by a nationalistic worldview that “Myanmar is beset by opponents within and without,” says Dr Abbott.

“International pressure and condemnation simply confirms this outlook and even ironically strengthening their obstinacy,” he added.

Yettaw's release could be a prelude to a new era of politics between Myanmar and the West. The fact that US Senator Jim Webb was allowed to meet Suu Kyi after UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was denied a similar visit earlier is encouraging.



Photos: Getty Images

The most significant development from this bizarre episode, perhaps, came from none other than the Lady herself. Reports of Suu Kyi softening her stance towards the tourism boycott and sanctions are emerging for the first time in many years, and could well be pivotal in steering Burma towards brighter days. **AG**