

US envoy meets Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi

US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell - the highest ranking American official to visit military-ruled Myanmar in 14 years - met Wednesday Myanmar Prime Minister Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Campbell, accompanied by US Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel, met Thein Sein in the capital Naypyitaw Wednesday morning before flying to Yangon where he was allowed a rare interview with Nobel laureate Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi, smiling and looking in good health, arrived at Inya Lake Hotel slightly before noon for talks with Campbell, whose two-day visit to Myanmar is part of US President Barack Obama's new policy of engagement with the pariah regime.

In a rare show of openness, Myanmar journalists were invited to take photos of the arrivals of Campbell and Suu Kyi at the hotel.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar independence hero Aung San, lives across the lake in her family's compound, where she has been under house detention for the past six years. She was recently sentenced to another 18 months under house detention, sufficient to keep her out of the picture when the junta stages a general election next year.

Campbell was expected to press the junta to release Suu Kyi, and some 2,100 other political prisoners, before the 2010 polls.

The US has indicated that it may consider lifting some of its economic sanctions on Myanmar, also called Burma, if the regime frees Suu Kyi and takes other measures to assure next year's election is 'inclusive,' free and fair.

On Tuesday, Campbell and Marciel met Myanmar Information Minister Kyaw Hsan, Science and Technology Minister U Thaug, and representatives of the Election Commission in Naypyitaw, 350 km north of Myanmar's old capital Yangon.

They were not granted an audience with military supremo Senior General Than Shwe.

The US envoys also plan talks with leaders of Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party, the Committee Representing the People's Parliament and the pro-junta National Unity Party.

Suu Kyi has welcomed Campbell's visit, seen as part of Obama's diplomatic initiative to engage with the pariah regime to encourage democratic reforms.

Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962. Suu Kyi's NLD party won a 1990 general election by a landslide, but has been denied power by the military for the past 19 years - of which she has spent 13 years under house arrest.

Another election is planned in 2010, but the international community is not expected to accept its outcome unless Suu Kyi and some 2,100 other political prisoners are freed beforehand and the NLD

is allowed to contest the polls.

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