AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I’m afraid a very frivolous thought has come into my head. What I find most striking about the world outside is that there’s so many different kinds of light switches and bathroom fitments – and that’s terribly confusing for me! But the warmth of the people of the countries I’ve visited, this has meant most to me.

FERGAL KEANE
Next week you go to Britain, which of course was such a huge part of your life as a young woman. And I’m wondering what you feel about going?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I’m looking forward to it, very simply. I want to see old friends again, and to rediscover old places where I’ve been happy.

FERGAL KEANE
Is it tinged with sadness as well?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I hope not. I hope it will not be tinged with sadness.

FERGAL KEANE
When you look back on the years you’ve spent under house arrest, cut off from everybody, really, do you ever regret the decision you made to stay in Burma?
AUNG SAN SUU KYI
No, I've never regretted it. Because I think that the decision that not just I alone but my colleagues made to continue with that struggle is beginning to pay off.

FERGAL KEANE
Even with all the pain that’s involved for you personally?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Not just for me – for others as well. And perhaps more for others than for me.

FERGAL KEANE
On engagement with Burma, a lot of British companies are now looking to invest. Can they do it with a clean conscience?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
It depends on the way in which they do it. I spoke at the ILO of the need for democracy-friendly development growth: to invest in a way that will promote democracy in Burma, that will empower the people, that will bring in new players into the economic arena, not just the same old people who have been enjoying a privileged situation for years.

FERGAL KEANE
So, in practical terms, if you’re a major British company wanting, for example, to go into the energy sector – because Burma has huge reserves of oil and gas – what do you do in practical terms? Who do you get advice from?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Well, I did talk about that, that those who wanted to invest in the extractive industries in Burma should make sure that the Myanmar oil and gas enterprise MOGE signs up to the IMF -

FERGAL KEANE
That’s the state-owned company?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Yes. IMF Code of Good Practices for Financial Transparency. Transparency is the key. Without transparency there can be no accountability. And unless there’s transparency we can never tell whether these investments are going to benefit the people or just the already privileged few.

FERGAL KEANE
So if you’re Shell or BP, stay away from joint ventures with the national oil and gas company?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
No, they should just tell the national oil – MOGE – to adhere to the IMF Code, and that they themselves also will adhere to that Code.
FERGAL KEANE
But broadly speaking you’re happy now to see British investment in Burma?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I would be happy to see ethical, responsible investment.

FERGAL KEANE
On the whole question of the transition, I wonder if you feel at all that too many people regard it as a ‘done deal’, when in fact the most difficult negotiations with the government lie ahead. Nothing is really settled at the moment.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Absolutely. This is what I keep saying. This is why I have been speaking out against what I call ‘reckless optimism’ and calling for a bit of healthy scepticism.

FERGAL KEANE
You think there is reckless optimism?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Yes, there is. And I called for healthy scepticism – which, I must say, was translated in the state newspapers as `promoting the good health of negativity’, which is a lot of nonsense! But I think we do need a bit of healthy scepticism in the sense that we need to be aware of the many challenges that still lie ahead.

FERGAL KEANE
On that as well, you’ve seen in the past week terrible ethnic violence: 30,000 people displaced. And the President, your main negotiating partner, has warned that this could derail the transition. Do you share his fears?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
We all share in such fears, in the sense that we’re concerned that things should not get worse and worse. But I would also like to point out that if there had been rule of law in our country, these communal disturbances would not have come to such large proportions.

FERGAL KEANE
What do you mean by that?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Because the very first time a crime was committed which was obviously going to have communal consequences, they should have taken action in accordance with the rule of law. If they had been able to do that, and to satisfy all parties involved that justice was being done – that is to say, that justice was not only being done but justice could have been seen to be done – I do not think that these disturbances would have grown to such proportions.

FERGAL KEANE
One of the other concerns that’s been raised in recent weeks is that the huge focus on you distracts from the really sensitive question of negotiations. I mean, you saw, for example, the President, your partner in negotiations, pulling out of an event in Thailand because he feared being upstaged by you.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I think this is a question you’ll have to put to him. He didn’t say that this was the reason why he did not go to Bangkok.

FERGAL KEANE
Pretty obvious, though, wasn’t it?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Well, you’ll have to ask him!

FERGAL KEANE
But do you worry about the kind of superstardom that surrounds you now?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I never think of myself as a superstar. I always think of myself as the recipient of a lot of kindness and warmth, for which I’m grateful.

FERGAL KEANE
The general elections are due in 2015, and that is seen by most people as the moment of truth for a transition to full democracy. But nothing has been negotiated with the government. What for you is the key thing that you’ve got to achieve in negotiations soon?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
We’ll have to see what happens when we really start working in the National Assembly, how far we are able to go to bring about the changes that we think are necessary to ensure that 2015 will be the opening of the doors to a truly democratic country – not just government; I would like to see a democratic country, a country which enjoys the protection of democratic institutions.

FERGAL KEANE
Because right now you can’t stand for the presidency because of having been married to a foreigner. Isn’t that the case?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Yes.

FERGAL KEANE
So how soon are you going to have that law changed?
AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I do not know. We have said that one of the main requirements for Burma is amendments to the constitution. So we'll have to see how long it takes for us to amend the constitution. People keep talking about 2015, but the really important years are now, before 2015. If we wait until 2015 to see what’s going to happen, it’ll be too late. We’ve got to start trying to make 2015 the kind of year we want it to be.

FERGAL KEANE
Because there are people who say that you...the NLD, have been naïve: the government is leading you up the garden path – it’s got you into parliament as a minority, and it’s going to keep you there.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
No, it can’t keep us there against our will. If we feel that we can best serve the people in parliament, we stay in parliament. We decided to run for the by-elections because we thought that we could serve the people better. We will, of course, be carrying on with our extra-parliamentary activities as we have been doing for the last 24 years. But at the same time we will be expanding our activities to include parliament.

FERGAL KEANE
Do you believe that the NLD is really ready for power? Because a lot of the comment that comes back – admittedly not in public, perhaps because people are in awe of you and don’t want to say it – is that the NLD is disorganised: it’s hard to know who makes what policy or who speaks.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Well, it’s true that we are still in the process of reorganising the NLD. You mustn’t forget that for 20 years we were not allowed to operate as a political party at all, even at the time before 2010, when we were still a legally registered political party. We were not allowed to recruit new members; all our offices – practically all our offices, apart from the headquarters – were shut down; and many of our best people were in prison. And it’s only since January that we have been allowed to operate again as a political party. Obviously we can’t be organised completely overnight – if ever a political party is totally organised.

FERGAL KEANE
But you accept there’s some validity to that criticism?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Oh yes, we are working on it. We have to start from the grass-roots level. We have to start with village conferences, and then coming up to the national conference.

FERGAL KEANE
I mean, you clearly have a sense of destiny about the future, about leading Burma. Do you think you will within the next few years?

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I don’t - I don’t know what you mean by `a sense of destiny’.
FERGAL KEANE
[Over] And you always say, I know, that it’s not about you – that it’s not about you; that it’s about the movement. But -

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
I don’t know what you mean, actually, by ‘sense of destiny’. I know what we are working towards. I know what our goal is. And I do believe that we’ll get there – not, perhaps, along too straight a road, and certainly it’s going to be difficult. But I do believe that we’ll get there.

FERGAL KEANE
Aung San Suu Kyi, thank you very much.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS