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80 AIDS patients penalised over visit

YANGON: The government ordered more than 80 people at a shelter for patients with HIV and AIDS to leave following a visit by freed democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (picture), the centre's organisers said yesterday.

Suu Kyi visited the shelter on Wednesday, promising to provide it with badly needed medicines. She also addressed a crowd of more than 600 who came to see her.

A day after her visit, government officials told patients they would have to leave by next week or face legal action because the centre's permit was not being renewed, said Phyu Phyu Thin, a pro-democracy activist who founded the operation. By law, home owners must seek government permission every two weeks to allow visitors to stay overnight.

"We have been allowed to renew our resident permits in the past. I think authorities want to pressure us

because of aunty's (Suu Kyi's) visit to the shelter," said Zeyar, a member of Suu Kyi's political party and one of the organisers of the shelter.

The military regime had kept Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, under detention for more than 15 of the last 21 years, and her release last weekend drew thousands of cheering supporters into the streets here.

Suu Kyi has since called for a "peaceful revolution" to bring democracy to Myanmar but has made it clear she is seeking dialogue with the ruling generals.

The shelter accommodates 82 patients, including young children, offering them housing, food, medicine and educational opportunities.

Zeyar said health authorities offered yesterday to move the patients to their own HIV centre.

"The pressure by local authorities has made the patients very sad, which will adversely affect their health." — AP

