

Peace prize puts pressure on SLORC

Reward for resistance

By Bertil Lintner in Bangkok

The award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is a clear signal to Burma's ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) that it can expect a tougher time internationally.

In describing her struggle as "one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent years" and branding the SLORC a "regime characterised by brutality," the Nobel Committee has also shown that Aung San Suu Kyi is still a key figure in Burmese politics even if she has not spoken or been seen in public for more than two years.

In November last year, Sweden, supported by all major Western democracies, tabled a resolution in the UN calling on the SLORC to end human-rights abuses and repression in Burma. However, at Japan's request, the resolution was withdrawn for a year following fierce opposition from Singapore, China, Cuba and Mexico. This means it is due to come up again next month. "With Aung San Suu Kyi being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, it will be more difficult for autocratic Third World regimes to lobby against the resolution," a Western diplomat said.

Observers seem to agree that it is in the international field that the immediate impact of the peace prize will be felt; inside Burma, sources report the repression is worse than ever. But if the prize will encourage the international community to take firmer action against the SLORC, there will be domestic consequences as well.

Aung San Suu Kyi's involvement in Burmese politics began more or less by accident. She returned to Burma from her home in England in April 1988 to nurse her ailing mother — at a time when the country was in the midst of political upheaval. Student protests had led to the most serious threat to the iron-fisted rule of Burma's strongman Gen. Ne Win since he seized power in a coup in 1962.

The unrest escalated into massive, anti-government demonstrations which were launched simultaneously on 8 August in virtually every town and city across the country. This was met with unprecedented brutality: army units fired indiscriminately into the crowds, killing thousands of peaceful marchers, including children.



Aung San Suu Kyi campaigning in 1988: still a key figure in Burmese politics.

Being the daughter of Burma's independence hero Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947, Aung San Suu Kyi had since her return come under pressure to take an active role in resolving the crisis. Until the massacre in August she had resisted such invitations.

But a week after the killings, she sent a personal letter to the SLORC, suggesting the formation of a consultative committee to discuss what she termed "a situation of ugliness unmatched since Burma regained her independence." The authorities never responded to her call for a dialogue, and on 26 August she appeared in public for the first time.

More than half a million people came to listen to her at the foot of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon. During her speech, the slim, professorial woman won the hearts of the audience; she emerged as the leading voice for the opposition.

Her background was complex. She had left Burma in 1960 at the age of 15 when her mother, Aung San's widow, was appointed Burmese ambassador to India. During her time in New Delhi Aung San Suu Kyi acquired her lasting admiration for the principles of non-violence embodied in the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. She left for Britain in 1964 to study at Oxford and after earning a BA moved to New York where she held several posts at the UN Secretariat. She married Michael Aris, a British Tibetologist, in 1972. In the next 16 years Aung San Suu Kyi spent time in Bhutan and Japan as well as Britain.

The street demonstrations came to an end on 18 September 1988 when the military stepped in again, not to overthrow a failing government but to shore up a regime overwhelmed by popular protests. Scores were killed once again as the SLORC assumed power.

To placate the outraged public, and to appease the international community who had condemned the carnage in Rangoon, SLORC Chairman Gen. Saw Maung allowed the opposition to set up their own parties and also promised general elections. There was no real freedom, however, and the country was placed under martial law. But within the strict limitations of the new regime, the opposition continued the struggle for democracy. On 24 September 1989, the National League for Democracy (NLD), was formed with Aung San Suu Kyi as its general secretary.

Burton Levin, the then US ambassador to Burma, commented at the end of 1988: "Even though she is married to a foreigner, nonetheless she touches a chord among the whole spectrum of Burmese life." For many Burmese she appeared as a reincarnation of her famous father, destined to carry out his unfinished work of leading Burma into the modern world.

In 1989, she embarked on a strenuous programme, travelling to virtually every part of Burma. Her insistence on Gandhian principles of non-violent confrontation came to play a crucial role in transforming the Burmese uprising into a sustained and remarkably coordinated movement. But her constant appeals for a dialogue be-

tween the political parties and the SLORC were routinely dismissed by the ruling military.

On the contrary, she was threatened and on 20 July 1989 the SLORC placed her under arrest in her own home on University Avenue in Rangoon. Thousands of NLD workers were arrested all over the country. Her two sons, now back in Britain, were stripped of their Burmese citizenship.

But regardless of these measures, Aung San Suu Kyi's basic message had begun to take firm roots among the population at large. Between her first appearance in August 1988 and the day she was placed under house arrest, she had delivered more than one thousand speeches across the country. These had echoed themes of her father's writings: the dependence of freedom on discipline, strictly fair treatment of political opponents and a deep distaste for power mongering.

With Aung San Suu Kyi muzzled, the pro-democracy movement suppressed, and the Burmese people fearful, the SLORC had probably hoped that the election it had promised would mean little. That was a gross miscalculation.

When the Burmese went to the polls on 27 May 1990, the NLD captured 392 out of 485 seats in the national assembly. Everywhere, the name that won the votes was the detained Aung San Suu Kyi. But the elected assembly was never convened. Instead, the SLORC began hunting down NLD activists and organisers, arresting thousands, including about 60 MPs-elect. Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. But though there are no signs of overt opposition left in Burma today, there is little doubt that she remains as popular as ever.

Although the ever-present military prevented the public inside Burma from expressing their emotions openly at news of her peace prize, it was met with almost tearful celebrations among Burma's many exiled communities. "This is an invaluable enhancement for our struggle for democracy. We must strengthen our resolve, we must step up our struggle for democracy," said Hia Pe, an NLD spokesman.

The reaction from the SLORC, however, was perhaps predictable. "I don't think there will be any impact on Burma... our present government is going to solve the problems in our country according to our plan," Burma's Bangkok Ambassador Nyunt Swe was quoted by the Bangkok newspaper, *The Nation*, on 15 October. But the impact is already being felt in Thailand, a staunch supporter of the SLORC since its inception in 1988. Both *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* have carried strongly worded editorials hailing the award and urging the Thai Government and other ASEAN states to reconsider their present Burma policies. ■

Differences between military rulers emerge

Cracks in the rock

By Bertil Lintner in Bangkok

Ever since it assumed power on 18 September 1988, Burma's ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), though despised domestically and condemned internationally, has been seen as a solid rock which has shown no cracks or internal divisions.

When the SLORC last met in Rangoon on 17 September, well-placed sources for the first time detected disagreements between some of the ruling generals. But the sources also emphasise that, whatever differences there may be within the SLORC, its 19 members are likely to try to remain united, at least outwardly, since any serious division within the junta could prove disastrous.

Details of the 17 September meeting are only now beginning to surface, but it appears that Burma's powerful intelligence chief, Maj.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, was at loggerheads with some officers from the armed forces. The first argument reportedly erupted over the appointment of a new foreign minister. SLORC chairman, Gen. Saw Maung, has served as prime minister, defence minister and foreign minister since 1988. But in view of the SLORC's international isolation, the need for a more active foreign policy was stressed and it was decided to let an English-speaking person, less burdened with internal problems than Saw Maung, take over. Saw Maung speaks no other language but Burmese.

SLORC members Lieut-Gen. Tin Tun and Lieut-Gen. Aung Ye Kyaw suggested their colleague, Lieut-Gen. Chit Swe, who now holds the portfolios of livestock breeding, fisheries, agriculture and forests in the government which, at least in theory, is separate from the SLORC though seven of its nine ministers are also junta members.

The softspoken Chit Swe is a true armyman who served as defence attache in Moscow between 1975 and 1977, and later became chief of the Bureau of Special Operations before being appointed to the SLORC in 1988.

But his nomination was overruled by Khin Nyunt, who pushed for Ohn Gyaw,

the director-general of the Foreign Ministry's political department. Missionary school-educated Ohn Gyaw, one of the few civilians in Burma's top leadership, has in effect also been acting foreign minister since 1988. Khin Nyunt won, and the following day Ohn Gyaw took up his new post.

He was almost immediately dispatched to New York to defend the SLORC's policies before the UN, where the Burma issue will be discussed in the world body's Third Committee in November. There is speculation that Khin Nyunt realised that in order to improve Burma's image abroad, it would have been counter-productive to appoint another general as foreign minister.

Other points of disagreement, however, suggest that the division between Khin

Nyunt and the army may be of an even more serious nature. Since the uprising for democracy was crushed in 1988, Khin Nyunt's secret police, the Directorate of the Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI), has rapidly expanded its network to watch the public and, more importantly, to identify and eliminate possible dissenters within the armed forces.

As a result, many field commanders feel uncomfortable with the increased surveillance of them and their men. This increase has been especially apparent since the May 1990 election, in which the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), made an almost clean sweep at the polls. To the surprise of many, the majority of the rank and file of the army also voted for the NLD. Since then, the DDSI has been busy arresting NLD leaders and activists, and infiltrating opposition groups. Today, the NLD is in effect defunct inside the country and the few remaining, discredited, leaders of the party have been cowed into submission.

Rangoon residents claim that one soldier in 20 now is a DDSI agent; among the traditionally volatile student community, one in 10 is supposed to be an informer. Even if vastly exaggerated, this assumption reflects public perception of the DDSI's extensive operation. It is impossible to estimate the total number of DDSI agents na-



Ohn Gyaw: civilian job.

MORGAN CHEN

tionwide, but Burmese army sources say that Khin Nyunt in 1989 had 14 intelligence units at his disposal. Today, there are 23 units throughout the country.

Observers note that at least two SLORC members were absent on 17 September: the Myitkyina-based Northern Command leader, Maj.-Gen. Kyaw Ba, and Maj.-Gen. Tun Kyi of the Central Command in Mandalay. Tun Kyi is said to have been avoiding Rangoon since he was accused of complicity in a local gems scandal last year while Kyaw Ba sent Brig.-Gen. Maung Set, the commander of the 503 Air Force base in Myitkyina, to voice his opinions. Maung Set suggested during the meeting that no DDSI activities should be conducted in the Northern Command area without first consulting Kyaw Ba. Khin Nyunt reportedly rejected this request.

Significantly, the air force chief, Maj.-Gen. Tin Tun, and the navy commander, Vice-Adm. Maung Maung Khin, were also instructed by Khin Nyunt on 17 September to seek permission from supreme commander Saw Maung and army chief Gen. Than Shwe before any rotation of their forces could take place. The loyalty of the navy and the air force has been in doubt since elements from these two services participated in the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1988.

At 52, Khin Nyunt is the youngest member of the SLORC and he was hand-picked in 1984 by Burma's undisputed ruler for nearly three decades, Gen. Ne Win, to become his intelligence chief. Many senior commanders see Khin Nyunt as "an inexperienced upstart" who is in power only because of his close association with the old strongman — which, paradoxically, is also the reason why no one, at this moment, dares to oppose him. Ne Win officially retired in July 1988, but he remains a revered father-figure for the army whose decisions and appointments nobody would even think of questioning.

This raises the question of what is going to happen when Ne Win, who turned 80 in May of this year, is gone. Khin Nyunt clearly sees himself as the heir to the throne, while other commanders evidently find it hard to accept this. But the SLORC also knows that continuing unity among its 19 members is of utmost importance for the future of all of them.

This need for unity, combined with deep respect for Ne Win, will almost certainly prevent Burma's generals from letting differences among themselves get out of hand. But without Ne Win as a stabilising factor, minor differences such as the ones that surfaced on 17 September may well escalate into a crucial power struggle, whether the generals want that or not. The recent SLORC meeting was a clear indication of what may happen in the not-too-distant, post-Ne Win era. ■

JAPAN

New prime minister in debt to Takeshita faction

Product of the system

By Robert Delfs in Tokyo

Kiichi Miyazawa, who has emerged as the almost certain winner of the race to succeed Toshiaki Kaifu as prime minister and president of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), will be a far more independent leader than his predecessor.

Miyazawa, 72, is respected for his penetrating intellect. Unlike Kaifu, he is already the leader of a major LDP faction. His experience in the upper reaches of politics and diplomacy over more than four decades, moreover, is unparalleled among active Japanese politicians.

But, like Kaifu, Miyazawa takes office heavily indebted to the Takeshita faction, the largest and most powerful in the LDP. The direction and tone of Japanese politics over the next two years will turn on the tension between Miyazawa's efforts to assert himself as a political leader and the power of the Takeshita faction, in particular the ambitions of Ichiro Ozawa, the former LDP secretary-general. Ozawa aspires not just to be prime minister, but to become a political overlord in the mould of Kakuei Tanaka, who personally dominated Japanese politics from the early 1970s until his disabling stroke in 1985.

The potential for future conflict was foreshadowed in well-publicised meetings

between Ozawa and the three LDP presidential candidates on 10 October, one day before the Takeshita faction announced its decision to back Miyazawa. As acting chairman of the Takeshita faction, Ozawa ostensibly met the candidates to hear their views on national policy. Faction leaders Shin Kanemaru and Noboru Takeshita did not attend the meetings, which were conducted in Ozawa's office.

It was a crude political gesture, conveying the impression that Miyazawa, Michio Watanabe and Hiroshi Mitsuzuka, all vastly senior in age and political experience, had in effect been summoned by the 49-year-old Ozawa. It also suggested that Ozawa, rather than Takeshita or Kanemaru, was in charge of deciding who would be the next party leader and prime minister.

Miyazawa began his career as a Finance Ministry bureaucrat in 1942, the year Ozawa was born. After the war, he became a personal aide to Hayato Ikeda a senior Finance Ministry bureaucrat who subsequently entered politics, taking Miyazawa with him. Ikeda, prime minister between 1960-64, founded the LDP faction that Miyazawa now leads. Miyazawa held a long series of important cabinet portfolios from 1962-87, including the Economic Planning Agency, Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Foreign Ministry and

CAMBODIA

Rough road home

Khmer Rouge leaders are preparing to forcibly repatriate tens of thousands of civilians living in UN refugee camps under their influence in direct violation of the Cambodian peace agreement scheduled to be signed in Paris later this month.

The move signals the start of a major confrontation between the UN and the Khmer Rouge as the UN tackles the massive task of organising the voluntary repatriation of civilians living in refugee camps along the Thai border. The process of UN registration of the individual wishes of each of the more than 330,000 refugees in UN-assisted refugee camps only began this month, and its implementation is not expected until early

1992.

The confrontation with the Khmer Rouge, which UN officials say is one of the most serious in years, threatens to disrupt the signing of the peace agreement and exposes continuing discord between the Cambodian factions. Deep differences persist despite the formation of the Supreme National Council (SNC), a body of national reconciliation that is supposed to govern Cambodia until UN-sponsored elections can be held.

In the most glaring example of direct interference, the Khmer Rouge detained the entire civilian leadership of the Site 8 refugee camp in early October after it came out in support of the UN plan for voluntary repatriation of civilians to