NAKINGS
NAKINGS
NAKINGS
BUSINESS
BUSINE

ASIAIER

JUNE 15, 1990

AUSTRALIA: A33.71
BANGLADESH: Take4.01
BUNNE: B60
CANADA: C44.56
CHINA: U822.01
INDIA: R52.00

BURMA'S TRIUMPH

Rebirth of a Nation

Celebrating The Election



Supporters of the National League for Democracy celebrate the election: "We shall seek peaceful solutions"

BURMA

Will the Winner Take All?



It was hardly the expected venue for an important meeting of a victorious party. A week after Burma's landmark May 27 election, the ten central executive committee members of the opposition National League for

Democracy (NLD) shuffled into what looked like the back room of a barn in Rangoon. Burlap bags were carelessly dumped in a corner and on cobwebbed shelves. But keeping up appearances was not a priority. After unofficially winning all but some 100 seats in the 485-member constituent assembly, the National League now had to tackle an even more difficult hurdle. How was the transfer of power from the ruling military junta, known as the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC), to be managed? With caution, decided the inner circle. "We shall utilise to the full all the resources and talents the Burmese people can avail themselves of, choosing the experiences we have been through to guide

us," said 72-year-old spokesman and central executive committee member U Kyi Maung. "We shall seek peaceful solutions to political unrest within the country."

Well might NLD leaders counsel pru-

dence. Burma's first multiparty election in three decades has heralded a new beginning for the country. But the polls' astonishing outcome has left both government and the National League off balance. The ruling Council had counted on a respectable showing by the pro-government National Unity Party. But from the outset SLORC had only vague plans for the assembly, declaring just that the body would need a year or

more to draft a new constitution. The generals said they would hand power to a civilian government only when the new charter was in place. For its part the National League had not really looked beyond the May polls, given the junta's

hardball tactics. Many of its leaders, including the magnetic Aung San Suu Kyi, were arrested and barred from running. Now the party also has to keep a wary eye on its impatient partisans. Reckons a diplomat in

Rangoon: "You can be sure there'll be a lot of bickering."

Burma's election commission has so far confirmed the victories of just 149 National League candidates. One area of NLD strength was Rangoon, where the party swept all 59 races it contested. While both balloting and canvassing had seemed free and fair, the final tabulation was moving at a snail's pace.

Moving at a snail's pace.

Authorities say complete results will be known by the

third week of June. The government insists that no formal or informal talks with the apparent winners can start before then. "This is not necessarily a bad thing," says another embassy source. "It will give the NLD and the SLORC time to decide



Detainee Suu Kyi



On patrol: "The army has the guns and will always hold most power"

how they can work together."

The National League is using the breathing space to put its house in order. Top of its agenda: the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and hundreds of other senior leaders. The fiery 44-year-old daughter of pre-Independence hero Aung San has been under house arrest in her Rangoon villa since last year. Accused but not formally charged with subversion, the NLD leader is totally cut off from her party. Her telephone has reportedly been disconnected. Only the help keep her company, though she is said to be taking her enforced isolation in stride. SLORC can theoretically extend Suu Kyi's detention after its original order expires July 20. But this is an unlikely scenario, unless the generals decide to deliberately bait the populace.

A possible collision between the party's student-intellectual faction and the so-called old patriotic comrades also needs to be headed off. The younger elements are calling for a tougher line against the government. "We have the absolute majority and sovereignty vested by the people so we don't have to listen to the SLORC," argues a member of the party's labour bureau. Urges 29-year-old Rangoon University senior Ko Ko Gyi: "We have to try to immediately [replace] the government." He is acting chairman of the banned All Burma Federation of Student Unions, the country's largest student organisation with

which many members of the NLD and other opposition parties are affiliated. The soft-spoken student leader stresses, however, that his group will pursue peaceful means to reach its goals.

The comrades retired military officers who rallied around Suu Kyi in late favour a more conciliatory approach. They seem to be considering the SLORC's charter-before-government plan. A proposal to set a four-month time frame has been floated. Sources say the disagreement between age and youth extends to the NLD's central executive committee, which at the moment is composed equally of representatives from the two factions. (Of the five other members in jail or detention, four, including Suu Kyi, come from the younger ranks.) The friction is reportedly exacerbated by the older members' insistence that it is their collective experience that can see the party through the storm.

The committee dismisses talk of a rift. "There are no big differences," insists Soe Thein, 45, who is identified with the intellectuals. "We have agreed on a more moderate approach." U Kyi Maung announced that the party has already written a draft constitution based on the 1947 charter, which was federal in nature and enshrined a multi-party system. The retired colonel also dismissed talk of an NLD witch hunt against the army for its bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 1988.

But the compromises rankle some in the rank-and-file. "There are many students who disapprove of our softer line," says party youth leader Yan Aung, 28. And new cracks threaten to appear if and when the National League finally takes over. "Two years ago this party was nothing," observes a diplomat. "Now everyone wants to be a minister." Other

PREDICTIONS

Going by the Numbers



"His health will be bad in the six months between May 27 and December," prophesies one of Burma's most popular astrologers. "He's like a candle going out. His days are over." So blunt a reading is unlikely to

reach the ears of Gen. Ne Win, the country's 79-year-old "retired" strongman. But many Rangoon seers privately agree that his future is indeed bleak. For the nation, however, they predict bright days ahead. Says another well-known fortune-teller: "Real democracy will be returned to Burma in a gradual fashion."

Like most of his countrymen, Ne Win is said to regularly consult with astrologers and numerologists. He is believed to make

Ne Win, 1987: Nines have it?



major political decisions based on their predictions. The number "9" is apparently considered especially significant. The current military junta, widely believed to be still controlled by Ne

Win, took power two years ago, on Sept. 18 (1 + 8 = 9). The country's first multi-party elections in three decades was held May 27 (2 + 7 = 9). Even the currency is not immune. A strangely denominated 45-kyat note circulates in Burma.

Astrologers confirm that May 27 was an auspicious day. The alignment of Jupiter and the moon was most favourable, explains the first seer. But the stars apparently neglected to say which side they were on, given the landslide win of the opposition National League for Democracy. "Ne Win will have problems with his own government and the elected parties," foresees the astrologer. Yet not even those who claim to see the future are ready to count him completely out. The "Old Man," notes another seer whose close relative once read for Ne Win, possesses much political acumen — and a violent temper.



Geoffrey Klaverkamp — Asiaweek

Zarganar's parents with newspaper picture of him: Waiting

FATES

Tears of a Clown



The drizzle came down non-stop, but thousands flocked to watch. Star of the show was Zarganar, Burma's most popular comedian. But this was no slapstick act. The balding, chubby-faced

performer was doing an impression of Gen. Saw Maung, head of the State Law & Order Restoration Council and effective leader of the country. "How can we criticise the past 30 years of development?" he mimicked the general. "We built hospitals with no medicine. Isn't that good? We built schools with no books. Isn't that good? Our heavy industries are producing toothpicks instead of heavy metal. Isn't that good? A football manufacturer is churning out rubber bands now. Isn't that good?"

An hour or so after that May 19 stand-up routine brought resounding cheers at the Yankin Teachers' Training College Stadium in Rangoon, plainclothes police picked up Zarganar outside his home. They took him to a nearby police station. His mother, Daw Hla Kyi, a candidate in the May 27 election, was summoned that night and warned not to protest. Next day Zarganar and another top jokester who has targeted the régime, Ayaing, were transferred to the capital's police headquarters. A few days later Daw Hla Kyi heard that her son was in Insein Jail,

secretly sentenced to five years. "I feel so numb," she sighs. "Nothing hurts any more. We have all suffered too much."

Zarganar, 27, started out as a dentist. But he never practised, and his penchant for drilling into the military with his sharp wit got him his certificate revoked only a year after his 1983 graduation. During the 1988 uprising that was ruthlessly put down by the army, he was second only to charasmatic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in drawing crowds. He has been interrogated by military intelligence "countless times," says his elder brother Wun Na. He was actually jailed in 1988. When he came out in April 1989 he complained of being whipped with bamboo sticks and having electric shocks administered to his legs and back. He was nearly bald — a result, his family claim, of the torture.

The comedian still went on poking fun at the army. At the Yankin gathering he joked about "frogs" — sycophants. He criticised the National Unity Party, successor to the defunct Burma Socialist Program Party, which was close to the army and the only legal party in the country until 1988. He implied that it still has military connections. "There are many *masala* [BSPP] frogs in a certain party," he told the crowd. "People should not vote for them." There is no more jesting now. His wife, Lwin Mar, visits him once a week in his 1.5-metre-by-2.1-metre cell. She says he is in low spirits. Other kin, too, are gloomy and have little hope of an early release.

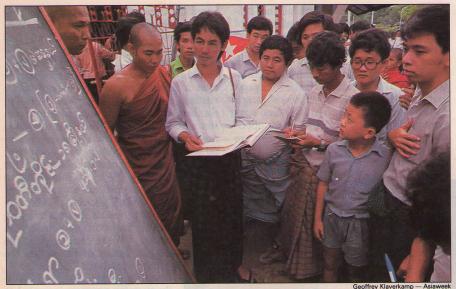
important issues will need to be discussed as well. One is the legal status of the new assembly. The government has not made clear whether those elected in May will become legislators after they have drawn up a new constitution.

The wild card in all the maneouvring is still the reclusive strongman Ne Win. The superstitious 79-year-old officially stepped down two years ago in a vain attempt to mollify thousands of pro-democracy rallyists. But the general is widely believed to remain in effective control. All of SLORC's members are his protegés, with the recently promoted Maj.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, the chief of intelligence, said to be especially trusted. Reportedly still in good health for a man his age, Ne Win has been keeping to his tightly guarded residence near Inya Lake in the capital's north.

There are any number of reasons that may cause Ne Win to eventually consent to a civilian government. "The military will be amused to see all its problems inherited by the NLD," points out an Asian diplomat. Besides, says another foreign observer, "the army has the guns and will always hold most power." Others in Rangoon's embassy row even speculate that the general may agree to transfer power in the fervent hope that the economy will be brought back to its feet. "Ne Win has tremendous moral courage in admitting that his efforts the past 30 years have ended in failure," asserts yet another source, noting that the general decreed a freeing of rice controls as early as 1987.

ndeed, in marked contrast to Ne Win's hermetic policy during most of his more than two-decade rule, Rangoon has been actively courting foreign investors the past couple of years. Timber and fishing concessions have been granted to Thai firms. Border trade with China has been opened. Potentially lucrative petroleum lease contracts have been signed with Japanese and other foreign oil companies. Last year the government reported that foreign investors brought in \$150 million. Onethird of that total was accounted for by signature bonuses from petroleum deals. Oilmen are particularly interested in the country because many of the lease sites are near old refineries with large proven reserves.

But the big money has yet to pour in. The U.S. and other Western governments have slapped Burma with political and economic sanctions because of the 1988 crackdown. Neighbouring Thailand has been a staunch friend, though. Last month Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Prapas Limpabandhu said Bangkok would take on the task of "convincing the international community" that democracy will come sooner to Burma if it is not made a pariah. The National League's win gives the régime a chance to score points.



Voters keep track of election results: Free and fair polls — but a slow tally

"SLORC will have to realise the need to hand over the government to the NLD," says a Rangoon diplomat. "It faces the possibility of losing support from its few friends such as Thailand by showing contempt for the people's verdict."

Some analysts say the army is also aware that it cannot indefinitely put off the transfer of power. "Many of their own members would oppose that," asserts a source in Rangoon. Along with most Burmese, soldiers spurned pro-government candidates. Constituencies with a large concentration of military men, such as Rangoon's Mingaladon and Dagon townships, voted the National League in. The trend had SLORC chairman Gen. Saw Maung worried. "It is essential that services personnel do not personalise the victory of the party they like and the defeat of the party they do not like," he warned three days after the polls. "Our duties will not be over

until a government has been formed in accordance with the law."

A split in the ranks is the junta's — and Ne Win's — worst nightmare. The Tatmadaw, as the Burmese call their army, is a formidable power base. Burma has a total of 90 divisional and 100 non-divisional infantry battalions. More than half of the troops are fighting a thankless 45-year war with ethnic insurgents in states bordering Thailand.

Ne Win has succeeded in hanging on to power because of his hold on the military. The Tatmadaw is a privileged organisation. It promises to look after its members until they die. To thousands of village sons all over the country, the army is a ticket to a guaranteed future. Indeed, even after the brutal crushing of the 1988 protests, the military encountered no recruiting problems. There is no sign of the Tatmadaw's turning its back on its long-time patron, despite the poll results.

Ne Win is also a master in cultivating officer material. He personally groomed all the present crop of military leaders, who are unflinchingly loyal to him. Gen. Saw Maung is considered a moderate and is well-liked by his men, says a diplomat familiar with Burmese military matters. The army chief is already 62, two years past the mandatory retirement age. The officer next in line is Gen. Than Shwe, who is also regarded as a moderate. Khin Nyunt, an unknown quantity feared for his ruthlessness, is said to be the second most powerful

man in Burma after Ne Win. But he is not expected to jump the queue.

Ne Win's confidence in the Tatmadaw's loyalty may yet tip the balance towards a civilian government. The strongman knows he can always intervene should things not go his way. As army chief in 1958, the general was asked to form a caretaker government because the administration of then-premier U Nu was paralysed by inter-party squabbling. Ne Win ruled for two years and restored order. Elections were held in 1960, which U Nu's party convincingly won. But internecine fighting again bedevilled his government. It was then that Ne Win took over again in 1962 and promulgated his now discredited "Burmese Way to Socialism."

The politically inexperienced Suu Kyi has her work cut out for her. For one thing, she must transcend her role as a symbol and provide the effective leadership to keep her party together. That is a formidable task even for a veteran, though diplomats reckon the martyr's daughter possesses the needed dynamism and moral authority. She has at least two other things going for her, add the sources. The economy is in such bad shape that the military will think twice before assuming all of the burden again. And Ne Win will not be casting his shadow forever. His eventual death will signal a new period in the army in which no one figure reigns supreme.

n NLD government must also rise to the challenge of the ethnic insurgencies. Ne Win had poured much of the country's financial resources into the fight — to little avail. Most observers believe that the war can never be won. "If the Karens are finished off, the army faces a whole new game with the Kachins who occupy most of their heavily-jungled and mountainous state," explains a diplomat. There are a dozen minority groups fighting Rangoon. The military insists that the

rebels lay down their arms before peace talks can be-

gin.

The first tiff, indeed, between the charter drafters and the Tatmadaw may well be over the issue of minority rights. At least in the short term, Burma's election winners will have to tread lightly around the army's sensitivities. Reckons a diplomat: "The influence of a civilian government can widen in time as in Thailand, but the process may be much slower in Burma because it is so far behind." Perhaps so, but the people of Burma had clearly decided that it was time to take the first step.

Filling up in Rangoon: Despite sanctions, some oil deals





Klaverkamp pauses from a hectic day of poll-watching in Rangoon

Asiaweek Pictures

TO OUR READERS

In the Midst of Change

n the week before Burma's May 27 elections, the Burmese consulate in Bangkok seemed under siege. Hoping to get visas, dozens of harried journalists filled forms out in quintuplicate, queued up and waited for hours as an elderly official calmly sat processing the mountain of paperwork. About 90 applications worldwide were eventually approved.

wide were eventually approved. And by the beginning of June more than 50 reporters, photographers and television cameramen had descended on traditionally media-wary Rangoon in time to assess the unofficial result of the country's first multi-party polls in over 30 years: a stunning win for the opposition National League for Democracy.

The decision to admit the international media had been a late one. Until about May 20, Burmese authorities were holding to a ban on entry by foreigners — tourists as well as journalists — during the election period. Indeed, it was the first time that the military government had opened the country's doors to the foreign press since December 1988, when then Thai army chief Gen. Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth

visited the Burmese capital for a day.

Among those in Rangoon was Bangkok-based Correspondent Geoffrey Klaverkamp, who reported this week's

package of stories on Burma's elections in INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. On arrival, Klaverkamp was surprised to find few outward signs of the momentous event that was taking place. "The hyperactive reporters were in stark contrast to the relaxed Burmese," he said. "The routine of city life — bustling markets, World War II-vintage buses spilling over with passengers and tea shops packed with chatting customers — appeared undisturbed. The absence of election hoopla made it almost impossible to tell that the opposition was on a victory landslide."

The government of Gen. Saw Maung apparently had been reluctant to let journalists in. Sein Win, president of the Foreign Correspondents Club in Rangoon, said he was not informed of the decision to allow foreign press coverage until just four days before the polls. Authorities continued to keep a watchful eye on just who

was flying in. A contributor for British radio was deported a few days after the election for an alleged visa offence.

Most of the press corps checked into the crumbling colonial-era Strand Hotel, where the staff was more used to coping with the needs of tour groups and a few visiting businessmen. The Strand, Klaverkamp reported, felt the strain of the influx. Newsmen-guests had frequent complaints about electrical faults, the lack of hot water in some rooms and cold toast at breakfast. Inevitably, the hotel's telex office was taxed to the limit as correspondents rushed to meet deadlines in

ASIAWEEK, JUNE 15, 1990

For these good deeds, the pe

Landing Hong

different parts of the world. "I'm looking forward to a nice, long sleep after all this," said one exhausted operator. But with more reporters landing in Rangoon to cover what could be a historic change of government, that sweet sleep was likely to be still some way off.

rites D. J. Prentice from the Netherlands: "One of the things that fascinates me about Asiaweek is the plethora of maps, diagrams, pie-charts, graphs, listings and tables which I always peruse carefully and with pleasure." Regrettably, fascination with our maps turned to disbelief. In the Feb. 16 issue, Mr. Prentice says, we "dumped millions of hapless Georgians in the seas and lakes of West Asia" through an incorrect colour code in the map "Peoples of West Asia." Then, in the map of "Turkestan" [April 13], "it appears that you have expelled not only the Turkish-speaking populations of Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania (mentioned in your text), but also that of European Turkey itself (no splotches). Or perhaps you 'transmigrated' them to S.E. Turkey, which was still occupied by Kurds [Feb. 16 issue]. What you did with the Kurds I shudder to think.' Shudder no more, reader Prentice. In the April 27 issue we mapped "Kurdistan: The Country That Never Was" — after tightening up our map-making procedures in the wake of the Turkestan misadventure.

MEDIA WATCH

Quadrilingual Reading



Singapore has three English, three Chinese, one Malay and one Tamil newspaper. All but Tamil Murasu are

Press Holdings. Malaysia's nowseparate New Straits Times grew out

LETTERS

General Warning

To the editors of Asiaweek

Your report on President Teng-hui's announcement that would nominate Gen. Hau as pr minister [INTERNATIONAL AFFA] May 18] is headlined "General sissatisfaction." This is not correct. The silent mass of our people do not s are the point of view evident in your article and in the activities of those claiming to favour democracy.

The so-called liberals are sir ply using Hau's nomination as an ex use for agitation and destruction. I don't think the silent mass will tolerate such actions. You had better a oid publishing such misleading reports and you should not show bias towards my fraction of society. You should chick whether you are reporting the thinking of the silent mass or just following a small bunch of radicals who opport anything, good or bad, for their ov purposes. CHING-YUIN HS

Election in Burma

Thanks and congratulations to U Ne Win and to Burma's present military government for holding an election that has been accepted by the world's democracies as fair and free [INTER-NATIONAL AFFAIRS, June 8]. The régime should immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political detainees, and cooperate with the National League for Democracy to return Burma to civilian rule.

For these good deeds, the people

may forgive nearly three decades of agony and the brutality of 1988. Loving peace, we Burmese are used to forgive-**TIN MAUNG**

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Remember that the election was an attempt to win international grace and aid and that there still has been no clear indication as to when the changeover will take place. Opposition parties and members of the public had repeatedly asked that a civilian interim administration run the country during the drafting of the constitution. Already General Saw Maung has Already General Saw Maung has changed his tune on the timing of the transfer. At first he said the State Law and Order Restoration Council would hand over immediately. Then he said the process would take time, according to the law, etc.

In fact the military rulers wish to remain above the law. Their aim now is to force the political parties towards a constitution that will effectively condone the soldiers' crimes and save the army from being held accountable for decades of misrule. DR. THAN LWYN

Parramatta, NSW, Australia

In Defence of Kokang

In "Life of Lo" [PERSPECTIVE, June 1] you refer to "the lawless interior of Kokang State." Kokang was ruled by the Royal House of Yang from 1661 to 1962. The last chaofa, Yang Kyein Sai, served as finance minister in the Shan States government in 1948 and as a delegate to the House of Nationalities. His younger brother, Yang Kyein Sein, was a delegate to the House of Representatives. Both represented Kokang in Burma's last

legitimate government, headed by U Nu. Since representatives were answerable to parliament, I fail to see how you could describe Kokang as lawless.

Lo Hsing-han is a Kokang Chinese. He was a minor retainer in the household of the ruling family. In 1962, Yang Kyein Sein initiated armed resistance in Kokang against Ne Win's unlawful seizure of power and the military's high-handed methods. Language being a constant problem for the armed forces, the military employed Lo to provide intelligence on Kokang

Reports on the drug trade always seem to focus on individuals like Lo and Khun Sa, as if their removal would end the problem. The political root cause of the problem has been overshadowed by media sensationalism. Because they differ from the Burman majority in culture, language and tradition, the people of Kokang, like their Shan compatriots, aspired to a measure of autonomy and went to war for it. No program aimed at eradicating opium can succeed until peace returns to that region. And only a government that respects the rights of minorities can bring peace.

Under the Union of Burma Citizenship Act of 1948, Kokang Chinese are a racial group indigenous to Burma and are therefore bona fide citizens of Burma. Many hold positions in public service, academe and the medical profession. Those who fled abroad have been successful in business, medicine, fashion design and engineering. Most of us Kokang people have a deep love for our homeland and would go back if given the chance to help in its de-

velopment.

NAME & ADDRESS PROVIDED

LISTINGS

Bestsellers

Bestselling English-language titles, based on the past month's sales throughout the region (the previous month's ranking is in parentheses):

Manila

- **Clear and Present Danger** Tom Clancy, Berkley
- Star Danielle Steel, Dell
- **Marcos Dynasty** Sterling Seagrave, Harper & Row
- The Negotiator Frederick Forsyth, Corgi (2)

5. Hunt for Red October Tom Clancy, Berkley

Kuala Lumpur

- The Russia House
- John le Carré, Bantam (2)
- A Brief History of Time Stephen Hawking, Bantam
- **Clear and Present Danger** Tom Clancy, Fontana (1)
- **Surviving the Great** Depression of 1990 Ravi Batra, Dell
- A Woman Named Jackie C. David Heymann, Signet

Bangkok

1. Spy Line Len Deighton, Grafton

- 2. The Russia House John le Carré, Hodder (4)
- Clear and Present Danger Tom Clancy, Fontana (5)
- The Minotaur Stephen Coonts, Fontana
- The Negotiator Frederick Forsyth, Corgi

Hongkong

- 1. Megatrends 2000 J. Naisbitt & P. Aburdene, Morrow (3)
- One Up on Wall Street Peter Lynch, Penguin
- Change of Flag C. New, Bantam
- **Marcos Dynasty** Sterling Seagrave, New English Library

5. A Bright Shining Lie Neil Sheehan, Picador

Singapore

- Love and Marriage Bill Cosby, Bantam
- Singapore Rendezvous Karen Holmes, Angsana (1)
- **Clear and Present Danger** Tom Clancy, Fontana (2)
- The Teenage Workbook Adrian Tan, Hotspot (5) Rightfully Mine
- Doris Mortman, Coronet

Sources: Asia Books Co., Ltd., Bangkok; Swindon/Hongkong Book Centre, Hongkong; Berita Book Centre, Kuala Lumpur; National Book Store, Manila; Times The Bookshop Pte. Ltd., Singapore.