

S. B. Anur
Myanmar
16/12

MYANMAR'S MANOEUVRE 49-10

IN EXTENDING THE imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi by one more year, Myanmar's ruling generals have left no doubt about their intention to tighten their grip on the country. And by doing so during the Association of South East Asian Nations summit held recently in Laos, they have made clear they care little about international criticism of their actions. The signs were all there from the time Senior General Than Shwe, the head of the State Peace and Development Council (the junta's official name), sacked Khin Nyunt as Prime Minister and replaced him with another General, Soe Win. Although Gen. Khin Nyunt was no softie, he favoured talks with Ms. Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy. He also initiated the "seven-point road map to democracy," which, despite its flaws, was a political concession by the SPDC in response to international pressure on it to loosen up. Weeks after the reshuffle in the regime, when the junta released 4,000 prisoners saying the old guard had wrongly detained them, it seemed as if Lt. Gen. Soe Win was striving hard to dispel his image as a military hardliner. There were only 20 or so political prisoners among those released but they included two close aides of Ms. Suu Kyi, generating hope that the Nobel laureate too might be freed. Such hopes were apparently misplaced.

Despite the junta's contempt for world opinion, India is one of the few countries that can put new pressure on Yangon to release Ms. Suu Kyi. It is unfortunate that the fate of Myanmar's most famous political prisoner figured only fleetingly when Gen. Than Shwe visited India soon after making changes for the worse in his Government. New Delhi's focus on strengthening economic and strategic ties with Myanmar is no doubt important, and it has brought immediate results: over the last month, Myanmar has cracked down on camps of Northeast insurgents

on its side of the border. But India, which presented Ms. Suu Kyi with the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding not so long ago, takes justifiable pride in being the world's largest democracy, and was part of the international chorus for pro-democracy reforms in Pakistan, has a moral and political responsibility not to abandon her altogether even as it engages productively with Myanmar's military dictatorship.

If more practical reasons are needed for stepping up pressure on the junta, they do exist. As was clear at the recent Laos summit, India has emerged as an important partner for ASEAN. New Delhi's help will strengthen the hands of the regional association in dealing with its most difficult member. Members of the 10-nation group refrain from commenting on one another's internal affairs, which is one reason why Myanmar has had a fairly easy ride since becoming a member in 1997. This time Thailand's insistence that the custody deaths of ethnic Malay Muslims in its southern province must not be raised at the summit worked to Myanmar's advantage. At the same time, members such as Malaysia are nervous about endangering ASEAN's carefully constructed credibility and relations with the rest of the world by allowing Yangon to assume the chair in 2006 and host that year's summit. A group of parliamentarians from several member-nations has mounted a campaign to prevent this from happening and, if need be, strip Myanmar of its membership. Before matters reach a head, New Delhi will do well to use its good relations with the junta to press for Ms. Suu Kyi's release and for the implementation of democratic reforms that will enable her to participate freely in Myanmar's political life. This will significantly benefit India's relations with ASEAN, as also its standing in the rest of the world.

16 DEC 2004

THE HINDU



Bravo Suu Kyi, Bravo!

The Myanmar generals have learnt to do their thing with great care, but with enough confusion, to divert the attention of the world from their primary concern; the damage that can be done to them by a lone woman, unarmed, without access to even supporters, but of great character and unflinching ideology. They have formed themselves into regional groupings and are all too ready to talk to anyone who calls, to give the impression that they are dedicated to the well-being of their people while their concern is only with their own interests. It was more than two decades ago that the military men of Myanmar, frightened out of their wits by the mere presence of the leader of the Democratic Party, forcibly removed Suu Kyi, the elected and acknowledged leader of her people and imposed a government which represents no one but themselves. And it has continued this way, despite all the talk of the *democratic* leadership in the world.

The generals with great skill and worthy of a better cause than they profess, have shown that they know how to blunt the edge of opposition, both inside and outside their country. They will issue statements, have meetings and behave in tandem to convey the impression that their rule is only for the time being, is harmless and very soon they will arrive at the spot from where they work towards restoration of the democratic process of government that they so rudely interrupted so long ago. We have to give it to these military men, trained in the military arts. They do not deviate and they do not budge — look at General Musharraf for instance! And yet it would seem that some days ago a group of military men called at the residence of Suu Kyi, no doubt to convey with surpassing dignity, that they have decided, to keep her in bondage for one more year. Note that at the same moment, they have

announced the release of 9,000 prisoners, including a small number of political prisoners, who are freed, completing releases promised by the military government.

Suu Kyi's current ordeal began more than a year ago when she was taken into custody in May last year, after her motorcade was attacked by a mob supporting Myanmar's ruling military junta in the country's north. Neat, isn't it! You first arrange to attack her motorcade and then rush in to protect her for a whole year against her wishes! Some protection this!

Suu Kyi has no oil that she can offer to the hard-headed leaders of the democratic world

Suu Kyi has been detained several times before. Her longest period of house arrest was from 1989-1995, during which she was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize! To no avail, for the generals. There was a commotion for a while and pressures to release her but the world's attention does not linger, this is a truth that the generals seem to understand very well.

It is time to tell George Bush and Tony Blair, the hitherto acknowledged leaders of the democratic process, that their entirely self-inflicted efforts to bring democracy to the pathetic landmass called Iraq, can with advantage be given up and something sensible like the release of Suu Kyi be taken up seriously, instead. But Suu Kyi has no oil that she can offer to the hard-headed leaders of the democratic world, so the chances of being persuasive must be quite remote! Iraq was a country that had the world's second highest oil reserves, yet they owed the world several billions in gold, now generously forgiven! The truth is that the unacceptable efforts to

subdue Iraq have cost Americans and British lots of cash which they cheerfully debited to Iraq and is now forgiven. It must be a good thing to be heading international groupings of cash rich countries which can be brought together and dispersed when no longer required. Forgiving Iraq's expenses on oil extraction are now in context, after the manner in which Bush gave large slices of Iraq's oil revenues to his friend, Dick Cheney, who happens to be his Vice-President, and of Haliburton company also, quite unable to extract oil despite George Bush's largesse. Preoccupied as they are over Iraq, the two leaders are unable to even look at Suu Kyi to see what can be done. And more's the pity.

The world is changing. Here's a message for the Myanmar generals. Do not think that the morass in Iraq will last indefinitely? In the Far East, countries are coming together in a manner that in a few years will rival the groupings that dominate the world today. America's dominance is not permanent. Have you heard of George W Bush recently? Have you asked — Why not? Because he is busy limiting resignations from his administration to seven out of the fifteen for his second term in the White House! If you believe that you can believe anything!

I stress that while we watch the epic struggle between Suu Kyi, the unarmed and alone leader of her people versus the frightened military men, who think they have the world at their feet, the enormity of the crime is clearly visible. What can be said about Suu Kyi has already been said. It remains to cheer her on her legitimate victory, no matter how long it takes.

Join me in raising a cheer for the redoubtable leader of her people and a woman who compels undiluted respect and attention. Bravo Suu Kyi, Bravo!!

05 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Suu Kyi under house arrest for another year

Associated Press

YANGON, Nov. 29. — Detained pro-democracy leader Ms Aung San Suu Kyi has been told she will remain under house arrest for another year, a spokesman for her National League for Democracy party said today.

NLD spokesman and party secretary Mr U Lwin said the party confirmed over the weekend that Ms Suu Kyi had been informed that her detention would be extended. The order, however, would be valid until September next year, suggesting it had been applied weeks ago without Ms Suu Kyi's knowledge.

He did not give further details of the order or how he learned of it. Ms Suu Kyi's telephone has been disconnected and party leaders have not been allowed to visit her since May.

The news about Ms Suu Kyi came the same day that the state-run press reported that over 9,000 prisoners, including a small number of political prisoners, had been freed, completing releases recently promised by the military government.

Ms Suu Kyi was taken into custody in May last year after her motorcade was attacked by a mob supporting Myanmar's ruling military junta in the country's north.

She was held first by the military, then



Ms Aung San Suu Kyi. — A file photograph

transferred to house arrest in September last year after undergoing an operation at a hospital in Yangon.

Ms Suu Kyi has been detained several times before. Her longest period of house arrest was from 1989-1995, during which time she was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

On Saturday, residents living near Ms Suu Kyi's house in Yangon said they saw three cars with police entering Ms Suu Kyi's compound. Mr U Lwin confirmed that members of the NLD's youth wing living inside her compound saw a police officer speaking with the detained leader, at which time she was apparently informed of the new detention order.

30 NOV 2001

THE STATESMAN

Reform riddle in Myanmar release

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Bangkok, Nov. 21 (Reuters): As the man who was Myanmar's second most prominent political prisoner enjoyed his first full day of freedom today, speculation deepened as to whether Min Ko Naing's sudden release portends serious political reform.

Hours after being granted his freedom, the former student leader who was jailed in March 1989 said he felt as if he had "awoken from dreamland" and just started to open his eyes.

But analysts say it is still too early to tell if he will notice any real change in the military junta that has kept him under lock and key for more than 15 years, and run the former Burma under various guises for more than four decades. In the murky and mysterious world of Myanmar military politics, optimists have a habit of being disappointed.

"I think we definitely still need to be cautious," said Aung Zaw, editor of the *Irrawaddy* magazine, a Myanmar newspaper based in Thailand, adding that the motives of Yangon's secretive generals were still unclear.

This weekend's mass prisoner release, which included a handful of opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) members, surprised analysts who saw last month's purging of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt as a step back for a political reform.

But opposition figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi was not among those released — the Nobel laureate remains under house arrest in her lakeside Yangon villa, and initial reports about the release of a high-profile aide, Win Tin, were false.

"Of course, this is good news but I think people in Yan-

gon remain quite sceptical, especially because the reports of Win Tin being released turned out not to be true, and the number of political prisoners released was tiny," Zaw said.

The junta, now under the exclusive control of army strongman Than Shwe, presented the mass release as a correction of arrests made "inappropriately" under Khin Nyunt's now dismantled military intelligence apparatus.

However, the presentation of corruption charges to explain Khin Nyunt's dismissal cut little ice with analysts who say the military administration is graft-ridden.

Only if the junta released Suu Kyi and started making credible noises about political reconciliation could people be sure it was serious about restoring democratic rule, said exiled opposition analyst Aung Naing Oo.

"If it starts talking about some concessions, for example, we will probably see the beginning of a political process moving towards liberalisation," Aung Naing Oo said.

In Yangon, the NLD was keeping a low profile, still reluctant to confirm the names of freed colleagues, possibly in case it triggered celebrations that might provoke a backlash from the ruling junta.

Other analysts have pointed to a summit on November 29 of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), one of the few international groupings to let in Myanmar, as a possible catalyst. Despite its policy of "constructive engagement" with the diplomatically isolated generals, Asean was expected to hit them with tough questions about Suu Kyi's detention and the fate of Khin Nyunt's "roadmap to democracy".

Myanmar student leader released

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Myanmar

Yangon, Nov. 20 (Reuters): Myanmar's ruling junta has freed its second most prominent political prisoner, leader of the 1988 student democracy protests Min Ko Naing, in a move analysts said could be a major step towards political reform.

"I feel as if I have awoken from dreamland and I've just started to open my eyes," Min Ko Naing said at his Yangon home after being freed from almost 16 years in jail and flown back to the capital from Sit-twe, 560 km to the west.

The release of Min Ko Naing, who had been in jail since March 1989, was one move Myanmar experts had been looking for as they sought to measure the significance of the purge of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt and his intelligence apparatus last month.

The other was the release from house arrest of democracy icon and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

She remained under house arrest at her lakeside villa in Yangon despite the junta's dramatic announcement it was freeing nearly 4,000 people held "inappropriately" by Khin Nyunt's now dismantled intelligence apparatus.

Members of her National



Student leader Min Ko Naing in Yangon on Saturday after his release. (AFP)

League for Democracy were among those filtering back to their homes from jails around the country in the wake of the mass release, but there was no word on whether Suu Kyi's deputy, Tin Oo, had also been freed from house arrest.

NLD spokesman U Lwin said the mass release generated hope Suu Kyi might be allowed to move out of the house, where she is without a telephone and needs military permission to see anyone.

NLD officials were reluctant to confirm the names of colleagues returning home, possibly because they did not

want to trigger celebrations that could provoke the military which has ruled the former Burma in one form or another since 1962.

But contrary to initial expectations, Win Tin, a high-profile Suu Kyi aide jailed in 1989, was not among those freed on Friday. He was imprisoned a year before the NLD won a landslide election victory in 1990 only to be denied power by the generals.

That election came two years after the military quashed the student protests, killing hundreds, possibly thousands. Win Tin's relatives quoted him as saying from jail on Saturday that there was no sign of his release.

Democracy activists celebrated Min Ko Naing's freedom. "Min Ko Naing is to the student movement in Burma what Aung Sang Suu Kyi is to the entire country," said Debbie Stothard, coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network on Burma, based in Bangkok.

"To see him released yesterday has been an amazing surprise for all of us," she said. "He had been kept in full solitary confinement for most of the past 15 years. So to see Min Ko Naing released is definitely a source of hope among human rights activists."

Junta accuses former PM of graft

Associated Press

YANGON (Myanmar), Nov. 7. — Myanmar's ruling junta has accused ex-Prime Minister Mr Khin Nyunt of corruption, and said he was ousted before he could unveil findings of his investigation of senior army commanders, official newspapers said.

Once-powerful Khin

Nyunt, who also headed Myanmar's intelligence services, was sacked on 19 October and is under house arrest.

Initially, the junta said he had been "permitted to retire for health reasons." But Gen. Thura Shwe Mahn, a ruling council member, said that Mr Nyunt was involved in a major corruption scandal,

and that he also threatened the armed forces' unity by investigating regional commanders.

Gen. Mahn said Mr Nyunt's actions "could have led to the disintegration of the military and posed extreme danger for the country." The General made the accusations in a speech to Yangon's business community. He

warned businessmen to reveal their connections with the ex-prime minister or his family. Mr Nyunt was known to have considerable business interests. Western analysts have viewed Mr Nyunt's ouster as the eruption of a long-simmering feud among the top leadership and a shift to even more hardline policies.

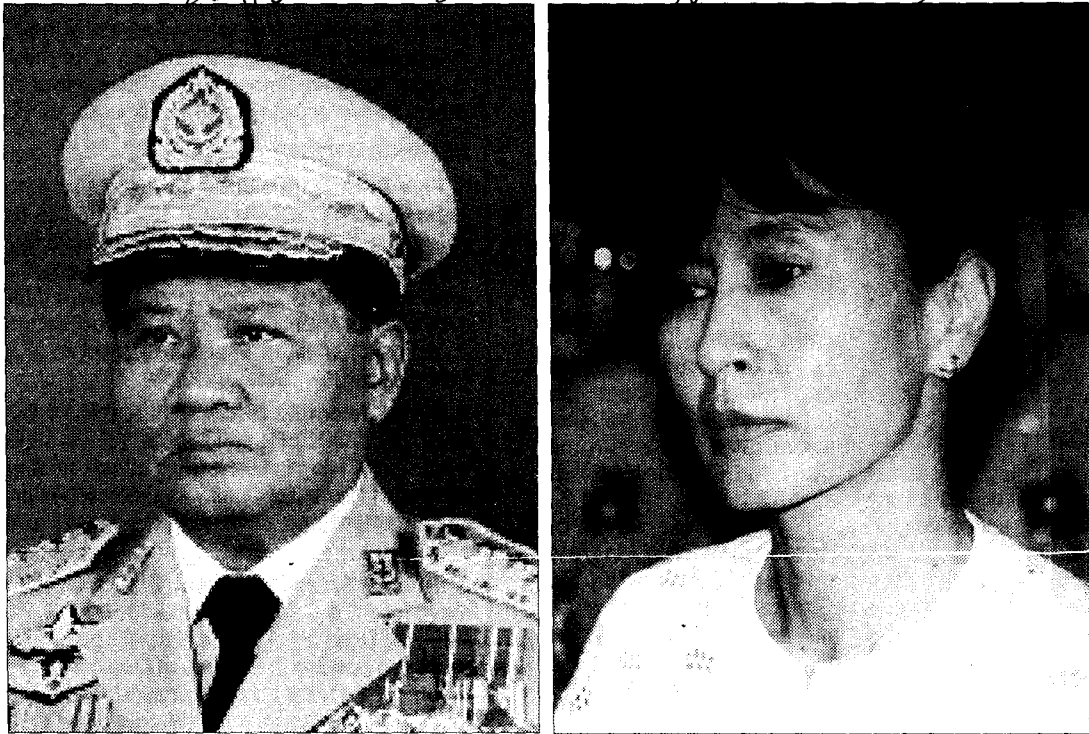
8 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Myanmar: Recognise reality

By Suhas Chakma

OPEN FORUM is on a crisis developing in our neighbour to the east, Myanmar. The dismissal and detention of Gen. Khin Nyunt, the then Prime Minister, and the subsequent announcement about cancellation of talks with Karen insurgents by the hardliners, is a clear indication of the shape of things to come. These events will have both short-term and long-term impact on the North-east for not only are rebels based there (NSCN, Ulfa, the various Manipuri groups) but it is also a major corridor for economic cooperation with South-east Asia as well as international trade, not to speak of exploration for oil and gas in Myanmar itself and the building of infrastructure there. The North-east is strongly interested in a stable, prosperous and democratic Myanmar with which it has historic and ethnic ties. — SH



Gen. Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi

NEW DELHI is to roll out a red carpet welcome for the chief of Myanmar's State Peace and Democratic Council, Gen. Than Shwe, who is sticking to his scheduled visit to India next week despite the ouster of Khin Nyunt, Prime Minister until a few days back and a senior army general, who favoured talks with the country's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and was relatively more open than his colleagues to engaging with the world.

This is a clear rebuff to the latest sanctions imposed by the European Union on the military junta for its failure to release Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner, recipient of the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding and her country's most visible face. It is a reflection of how economic and geo-political considerations have stifled the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, and of the tough line pursued by men like Than Shwe in the internal power struggle.

Delhi wants Yangon's cooperation in tackling insurgents from the North-east based in

Myanmar's western hill tracts, including members of the United Liberation Front of Asom, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (both major factions) and various Manipuri groups, including the United National Liberation Front. Given the attitude of Bangladesh, especially its belligerent foreign minister Morshed Khan, New Delhi is desperately seeking a partner. Irrespective of whether Yangon accedes or not to New Delhi's request, Gen. Than Shwe has a few lessons for political leaders here as well as mandarins in both North and South Block.

Unable to resolve the ethnic problems militarily, the Burmese generals have followed a more pragmatic approach and signed cease-fires or standstill arrangements with 17 armed groups including the powerful Kachin Independence Army, New Mon State Party, Karenni Liberation Army. While pursuing talks with the Karen National Union, the SPDC split the KNU on religious lines and a new Democratic

Open forum

Karen Buddhist Association has been formed.

Indeed, these cease-fire agreements with the armed groups represent the most serious weaknesses in the pro-democracy movement. If generals do not seek military solutions, how should democratically elected leaders of India react?

Years of frozen relations followed India's open support to Suu Kyi in the late 1980s but a thaw was visible when the then foreign secretary (and currently national security advisor) JN Dixit visited Yangon in 1993. India's concerns of the early 1990s, specifically Yangon's closeness with China, perhaps no longer hold the same importance. Yangon always skillfully engaged with New Delhi, at arm's length but extracting far more than it has given away.

Thus, when India alleged in December 2001 that two Pakistani nuclear scientists with alleged links with Al-Qaida were in Myanmar, Yangon reacted by freeing about 200 UNLF guerillas who were detained in November 2001.

India must come out of its mindset of a "Bhutan type" operation against Ulfa and other insurgents in Myanmar or Bangladesh as such an operation cannot be replicated elsewhere. India put pressure on Bhutan since the armed groups shifted camps to the tiny Himalayan kingdom in the early 1990s. New Delhi provided weapons to the Royal Bhutan Army and trained its personnel in counter insurgency operations. Yet, Bhutan intervened only after it regarded the Ulfa and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland as posing serious security threats to its sovereignty and established dozens of camps in southern Bhutan. Being Bhutan's advisor on defence and foreign policy issues under the 1949 Indo-

Bhutan Friendship Treaty, New Delhi has unparalleled leverage. Bhutan's first and second Five Year Economic Development Plans were totally funded by India, which continues to substantially bankroll its economy. New Delhi cannot provide such assistance either to Burma or Bangladesh.

India often cites "Operation Golden Bird" of 1996 when Indian forces and the Myanmar army had trapped scores of north-eastern militants in a pincer movement on the Mizoram border as a successful joint military operation. Yet, this initiative was lost when Yangon was infuriated by the Nehru award to Suu Kyi. Later, the Myanmar military allegedly infiltrated Indian military intelligence and wiped out virtually the entire leadership of the National United Party of Arakan in the Andamans six years ago, where the Myanmar militant group had been kept by the Indians.

Diplomacy without necessary leverage is an exercise in vanity. Despite the repeated verbal pressure on Bangladesh regarding the militant camps in that country, Dhaka knows that India's efforts to explore and export oil from Myanmar, to be cost-effective, must go through Bangladesh. And despite severe pressure from oil companies and the USA, Dhaka has refused to sell gas to India citing domestic compulsions.

India has often failed to use its leverage that arises from its democratic traditions. If the United Progressive Alliance government could change its policy towards Palestine, there is no reason why the same cannot be replicated with regard to Myanmar's pro-democracy movement. Since it does not raise concerns either about the restoration of democracy in Myanmar or Aung San Suu Kyi's continued detention, it has little leverage over the SPDC.

(The author is Director, Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi.)

THE STATESMAN

23 OCT 2003

No change in policy after Nyunt ouster: Myanmar

Agence France Presse

YANGON, Oct. 22. — Myanmar's military leadership has admitted the ouster of the nation's premier was linked to corruption but denied it signalled an end to tentative democratic reforms, a diplomatic source said today.

Junta leaders told foreign diplomats that General Khin Nyunt had been allowed to retire for health reasons but also said he was "responsible" for corruption within military intelligence, which he headed for 20 years, the source said. Gen. Nyunt was however not named as being personally involved in corrupt dealings, said the source, who did not want to be identified.

State media reported on Tuesday that the ex-premier had retired on health grounds. Officials in neighbouring Thailand said he had been sacked for corruption.

Senior diplomats in Yangon were briefed at a meeting yesterday attended by Soe Win, the military hardliner named the new premier, and foreign minister Nyan Win.

Diplomats were told the military would continue with a seven-point "road map" to democracy outlined by Khin Nyunt in August 2003.

The stalled process, which is supposed to conclude with multi-party elections, has been dismissed as a sham by the United States and boycotted by the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD).

THE STATESMAN

28 OCT 2004

Myanmar's once-powerful PM may have been ousted

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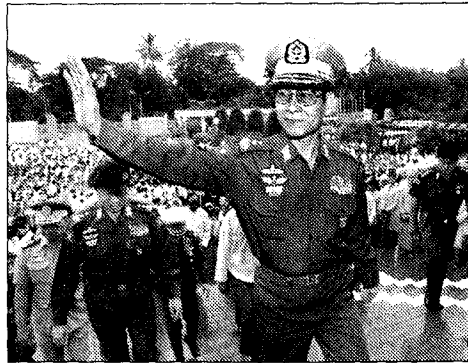
Yangon: The secretive military government of Myanmar was at the centre of rumours on Tuesday. Diplomats in Myanmar and senior officials in neighbouring Thailand said that the Prime Minister, the long-powerful Gen Khin Nyunt, had been removed from office. In Myanmar, a highly closed society, several rumours have been circulating, including that Khin Nyunt had been forced to resign and that soldiers had raided the military intelligence headquarters, which Khin Nyunt had long headed.

Diplomats in Yangon said on condition of anonymity that there was a rumour that Khin Nyunt had been "taken out of circulation," but they had no details. The rumours could not be immediately confirmed either in Myanmar or in Thailand. But if proven true, the ouster could further a shift towards hardliners within the junta and hamper reconciliation with the pro-democracy opposition led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Thai Gen. Lertart Rattanatavanich told reporters in Mai Sot, a Thai town on the border with Myanmar, that Thai army reports indicated that the junta "is unhappy with Khin Nyunt and they want to remove him from his position." "We believe that whatever has happened is about changing the position of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt," Lertart said. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was holding a cabinet meeting in the eastern town, said he had "received reports

that there is some political tension in Myanmar" but could not confirm what was happening.

Meanwhile, Bangkok metropolitan police chief Lt Gen Pansiri Prapawat told reporters he had ordered tighter security at the Myanmar embassy over concerns about the reports. In the streets of Myanmar's capital, Yangon, there was no sign of tanks or increased military presence, and any ouster



Khin Nyunt at a dance contest held in Yangon recently

would appear to have been an internal affair. Khin Nyunt assumed the prime minister's post last year in what was seen as a demotion from the positions he had previously held in the ruling clique of generals, increasingly dominated in recent years by hardliners. In some aspects, Khin Nyunt is considered a moderate, though he never prevailed on other generals to strike a deal with the high-pro-

file leader of the opposition, Suu Kyi, to restore democracy to this impoverished Southeast Asian country. In the past year, Khin Nyunt promoted what he called a road map toward democracy in UN-brokered contacts between the government and Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy. The talks went nowhere, and critics accused the government of using stalling tactics to retain its monopoly on power. Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962, when army commander Ne Win seized power. Pro-democracy protests led by Suu Kyi were bloodily suppressed in 1988, and Khin Nyunt was one of the younger generation of generals who assumed power. AP

Myanmar PM sacked: Thailand

Press Trust of India

BANGKOK, Oct. 19. — Myanmar's Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt, who was seen as favouring talks with pro-democracy leader Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, has been ousted and placed under house arrest by conservative elements in the military junta on charges of corruption, the Thai government said today.

"Khin Nyunt was removed from his position, but Myanmar has not yet made an official announcement," Thai Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra told reporters.

Earlier, a Thai government spokesman said that 64-year-old Gen. Khin Nyunt, who was also the head of Myanmar's military intelligence, had been placed under house arrest on corruption allegations. It is not known who will succeed the him.

But, Mr Shinawatra said, the next Prime Minister will be from the inner circle of Senior General Than Shwe, the head of the military junta. However, he did not give the name.

There had been speculation for some time about the widening rift between Gen. Khin Nyunt, number



General Khin Nyunt

three in the power hierarchy of the military junta, and the strongman Sr Gen. Than Shwe.

Gen. Nyunt, a moderate, had been trying to get the roadmap to democracy and multi-party rule implemented in the country. He was at least prepared to discuss the release from house arrest of Ms Suu Kyi.

Gen. Khin Nyunt's ouster could mean a further delay in the release of Noble laureate Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest for the past 16 months. Gen. Nyunt was appointed soon after Myanmar was condemned internationally for the detention of Ms Suu Kyi following clashes between her supporters and a pro-junta mob in 2003.

JUNTA RULE

India Should Put Pressure On Myanmar Regime To Free Suu Kyi

By SOE MYINT

Hope of democratic reforms in Burma are fading fast. Myanmar's military leadership has hardened its attitude to the democratic opposition led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Rangoon's generals seem set on their seven-point "roadmap for democracy" with or without the support of the National League for Democracy which won the 1990 general elections. Their goal is obvious: to legitimise the military's political role.

An indication of the junta's fist-clenching posture was the arrest of Suu Kyi in May last year. She had been released from house arrest in May 2002, and was busy meeting her supporters and re-building her party's grass-root-level organisations. During one such journey, on 30 May 2003, Suu Kyi and her party were brutally attacked by thugs allegedly sponsored by the regime.

Suu Kyi and NLD vice-chairman U Tin Oo were taken prisoner, and several members and supporters of the NLD were reportedly killed in this attack. Burmese pro-democracy activists now refer to this attack as the "Depayin massacre".

Global outrage

Suu Kyi's arrest provoked outrage across the globe, including in India, the United States, the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations. The Burmese military government's response came in the form of a document that purports to support democracy but is an attempt to subvert democratic institutions. There was no time-frame for the seven-point "roadmap for democracy".

The junta appointed the powerful military intelligence chief, General Khin Nyunt, Prime Minister in August 2003. The roadmap, among other things, recommends reconvening a national convention whose members were handicapped by the junta and completion of a draft new constitution. The junta abolished Burma's last constitution when it came into power in 1988 and the country has no constitution now.

The convention, initiated in 1993, was suspended three years later after NLD delegates walked out in protest, accusing the government of preventing their functioning in a democratic manner. On 17 May this year, the Burmese regime re-convened the convention, but the NLD opted to stay out after the junta refused to release Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo and allow party offices to reopen. Political parties representing Burma's key ethnic nationalities which had successfully contested the 1990 election — among them the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) — followed NLD's lead and refused to participate in the convention.

Outside Burma, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan and several governments, including those of Thailand and Malaysia, voiced

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their concern. The UN human rights envoy to Burma, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, stated that the convention, in its current incarnation, lacks credibility. "This political transition will not work; it will not work on the Moon, it will not work on Mars", he said. "They (the military leaders) can insist, but they will not be successful".

None of this deters the Burme-

Burma's national symbol.

India offered asylum to U Nu, the first and last democratically elected Prime Minister of independent Burma after he was overthrown by a military coup, led by General Ne Win, in 1962. When a nationwide pro-democracy uprising broke out in 1988, India under Rajiv Gandhi supported the Burmese democracy movement. In 1993, the Indian



se government. The convention opened on 17 May with 1,076 delegates, including representatives of the Kachin Independence Organisation. What the ruling military government, the election-winning NLD and non-Burmese ethnic groups did was to adopt a common and pragmatic approach towards resolving the country's long-standing political stalemate. This deadlock prevented Burma from developing into a modern and truly democratic nation. All stakeholders, including the Myanmar Armed Forces, must live up to their role in national reconciliation and nation-rebuilding and recognise the vital role others have to play.

Burma and India have historically had close ties and cultural links. Buddhism originated in India and flourished in Burma. Burma's first generation growing up under colonial rule received its higher education at Calcutta University. Independent India lent its constitutional expert Sir BN Rau to Burma when Burma's post-independent future was being drawn up.

Strategic interests

Pandit Nehru and Burma's independence hero Aung San, father of Suu Kyi, were "brothers-in-arms" in their fight against colonialism. Netaji based his Azad Hind Fauj in Burma during World War II. On his way to London to conclude the Aung San-Attlee Agreement for Burma's independence from the British, Aung San stopped over in Delhi to confer with Nehru who gave a coat to Aung San so that he could shield himself from Europe's harsh winter. Wearing that coat, Aung San became

dent Bhairon Singh Shekhawat visited Burma. The Burmese military junta's General Than Shwe is set to visit India in the near future.

It is debatable, however, whether India's so-called "strategic interests" have been served by its past decade of friendship with Burma's dictatorial regime. I am not arguing that India should reverse its current policy on Burma. However, India has scope for positive action. Rangoon's generals should not be left in any doubt that India stands firmly by the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people.

At present, around 1,500 Burmese refugees and asylum-seekers live in New Delhi. About half of them are recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as refugees. But the rehabilitation of Burmese refugees in India has been a major UNHCR failure. The majority of Burmese in India face tremendous hardship. UNHCR has started implementing a phase-out programme, which cuts the meagre subsistence allowance to refugees on the assumption that refugees should earn their livelihood in India. However, the majority of Burmese in New Delhi have no access to remunerated work.

Burmese prisoners

The case of 36 Burmese prisoners in the Andaman Islands also deserves attention. On 12 February, 1998, the Indian army arrested 36 Burmese nationals — 25 Arakans and 11 Karens — in a military operation called "Operation Leech" in the Andaman Sea. They were charged in 1999 under the "Arms and Explosive Substance Act" and under section 3(1) (b) of the "National Security Act" of 1980. The Indian military failed to produce the evidence to prove these allegations. For more than six years, these Burmese have been held without trial. India's foreign policy towards Burma must be based on the common aspirations of the two peoples for democracy.

Natwar Singh, India's present foreign minister, wrote in 1995 in an article entitled "The Heroic Lady of Myanmar": "I conclude by appealing that India do more to expose the totalitarian regime of Burma and make every effort to ensure Suu Kyi's unconditional release. That is the least we can do for Aung San's brave daughter". The UN's special envoy to Burma, Razali Ismail, recently urged India to apply pressure on the Burmese military junta to release Suu Kyi.

India's new government is alarmed at reliable reports suggesting that the Burmese government has succeeded in purchasing nuclear-reactor technology from North Korea. Without doubt, there would be great cause for Indian concern if Burma, which has comfortable friendships with China and Pakistan (both nuclear nations), attains nuclear status.

The least India can do for Burmese democracy is to help expose the authoritarian rule in Burma.

LOST OPPORTUNITY IN MYANMAR

MYANMAR'S MILITARY RULERS have once again shown they lack the will and courage to take the one big step necessary for demonstrating they are sincere about restoring democracy in the country — freeing Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the pro-democracy movement under arrest since last May. The junta recently released a few other members of Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy jailed in last year's crackdown, and allowed key members of the party to visit their leader in house imprisonment. This raised hope that the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was preparing to free the Nobel laureate to enable her to participate in a national convention on a new Constitution, revived after eight years this week. Invitations from the SPDC to 54 NLD members to attend the convention strengthened this belief. Even though Ms. Suu Kyi was not among those invited, it seemed the generals had finally realised that only the involvement of Myanmar's main pro-democracy movement could give meaning and legitimacy to this exercise. But by rejecting the NLD's condition that it would participate in the convention only if Ms. Suu Kyi, and the deputy leader of the party, Tin Oo, were granted their freedom, the SPDC has underlined its reluctance to take any step that might loosen its hold on power. In the end, it invited a boycott by the NLD even if that destroyed the credibility of the convention rather than risk the consequences of freeing Ms. Suu Kyi and her colleague.

It is unfortunate that the military dictatorship has passed up yet another opportunity to resume its long-broken dialogue with the pro-democracy movement. If the SPDC wants to be taken seriously by the global community, it cannot indefinitely side-step such an engagement, pretending that neither Ms. Suu Kyi nor the NLD matters. The SPDC's present bravado is attributable to the mea-

sure of international legitimacy it has eked out in the last few years, especially in its neighbourhood. The Association of South East Asian Nations admitted Myanmar as a member in 1997, professing the belief that constructive diplomacy with the military dictatorship would succeed where isolation-inducing economic sanctions imposed by the West had failed. The ASEAN backed the "seven point road map to democracy" that the Prime Minister, General Khin Nyunt, announced last year. Thailand, which has economic and strategic interests in Myanmar, also initiated the so-called Bangkok Process last December to nudge the regime towards the democratic reforms promised in the road map. The revival of the convention was the first step in the map. But going by the widespread dismay at how it has turned out, the SPDC's friends in the region are clearly embarrassed.

But nothing will change unless these countries also convey their displeasure to the regime in no uncertain terms. President George W. Bush has responded by labelling Myanmar an "extraordinary threat" to U.S. interests and extending economic sanctions on it for another year. But aside from the efficacy of sanctions, the U.S. can no more claim any moral authority over the international community. Through their policy of engagement, Myanmar's neighbours, including India, which has the best democratic credentials in the region, have better leverage over the SPDC and must exercise it. When Ms. Suu Kyi was arrested last year, ASEAN shook the junta out of its smugness by making a surprise departure from its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member-states to demand her release. Stronger and more sustained pressure is required to force the generals to abandon their obduracy, release Ms. Suu Kyi, and begin negotiations with her on the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

Suu Kyi to be freed soon, says party

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Yangon, April 19 (Reuters): Aung San Suu Kyi, the charismatic Opposition leader in military-ruled Myanmar, may be freed from house arrest in a day or two, her National League for Democracy (NLD) party said today.

Speculation has been rife that the Nobel peace laureate will be freed after the junta allowed the NLD to re-open its Yangon headquarters on Saturday, nearly a year after it was shut and its leader detained.

"I think she will be released in a day or two," NLD chairman Aung Shwe said outside the party's ramshackle offices which officially reopened today.

Aung Shwe, who was freed from house arrest last week, did not say why he was optimistic that Suu Kyi's third major period of confinement would end soon. The government and state media have been silent.

As NLD leaders met inside, dozens of supporters anxiously waited for news on the same street where jubilant crowds mobbed Suu Kyi after her last release from house arrest in May 2002.

"We hope she will be freed. This would be the best way to break the political deadlock,"



Aung San Suu Kyi

said one man. Some Yangon-based diplomats believe there have been contacts between the military and Suu Kyi on the junta's proposed "road map to democracy", which includes multi-party constitutional talks due to start on May 17.

But they said it was not certain Suu Kyi would be freed before the National Convention opens next month. "I think it is unlikely they will release her before May 17. The government may be fully aware that she will not join the National Convention

and she would be in a position to disrupt the whole process," one Asian diplomat said.

The first convention was suspended in 1996 after the NLD walked out accusing the junta of manipulating the process.

The NLD has refused to consider joining the talks until Suu Kyi and her vice-chairman Tin Oo are freed and meet the party's executive committee. They are the last senior NLD leaders still confined since a bloody clash between her followers and government supporters in May last year.

"We will decide this matter only when she comes out," said Aung Shwe, who led the party's delegation at the last conference.

Suu Kyi, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner, emerged as a figurehead of the pro-democracy movement in 1988, and has faced years of harassment by the junta. She was held under house arrest from 1989 to 1995 and for 19 months until May, 2002. Her release then was greeted by jubilant crowds in Yangon amid hopes the country's political deadlock would end with fresh negotiations. But the talks eventually collapsed and Suu Kyi was arrested along with other NLD leaders after clashes last May.

THE TELEGRAPH 20 APR 2004

Suu Kyi to be invited to constitution talks

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BANGKOK, APRIL 3. Myanmar's military Government will free the Opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, by May 17 and invite her party to join a constitutional convention, the country's Foreign Minister, Win Aung, said on Saturday.

He made the announcement in an interview with Japan's NHK television network and Thailand's iTV channel soon after arriving in Bangkok for talks with the Thai Foreign Minister, Surakiat Sathirathai.

However, speaking to reporters later, Mr. Win Aung refused to confirm Ms Suu Kyi's release. "I am not in a position to inform you right now about it," he said.

"The problem of Aung San Suu Kyi will be taken care of," he added. "We don't have any hate, any animosity ... against Suu Kyi."

In the interview with the TV networks, Mr. Win Aung said Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy will be invited to attend the constitution-drafting National Convention, which the junta



Aung San Suu Kyi

has said will begin on May 17. Asked if Ms. Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, will be released before the event, he said: "Yes, May 17." Asked to give an exact date for her release, he said, "It is too early to say."

Myanmar does not currently have a constitution. The junta first organised a National Convention to draft a constitution in 1993, but suspended it in 1996 after Ms Suu Kyi's party walked out, saying it was being forced to rubber-stamp the junta's decisions. — AP

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