

# Will Suu Kyi Freedom Herald Democracy?



The military junta had perhaps no option but to set Nobel Peace Laureate and leader of Myanmar's National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi free. But will it usher in democracy in the country? There are mixed feelings across the international political spectrum, finds **JAGDISH N SINGH**

So, at long last, Nobel Peace laureate and leader of Myanmar's National League for Democracy Aung San Suu Kyi is free. The military regime in the country had kept this daughter of father of modern Burma Aung San under detention most of the time ever since her party won a massive mandate in the country's parliamentary elections in 1990. The junta deprived her of contacts with all near and dear ones, including her children, grandchildren and even her British academic husband who died in 1999 battling with cancer. But nothing could dilute her courage of

conviction in her Gandhian-Buddhist methodology of political struggle for democracy and human rights in the country.

In her famous "Freedom From Fear" speech, Suu Kyi said, "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.." Her mass movement along this highly moralistic framework was bringing her with each passing day more and more support throughout the world—in Europe, Australia, North and South America, Israel, Japan, South Korea, South Africa, India, Bangladesh and

the Maldives. More recently, there was growing criticism of her detention also by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Malaysia even warned Burma of expulsion from ASEAN. In December 2008, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Burma and calling for her immediate release. Prominent world personalities, including Nobel Peace Laureates the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Shirin Ebadi and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, also called upon the rulers of Burma to release her and "create necessary conditions for a genuine

dialogue.”

Against this background , the military junta had perhaps no option but to set her free. But will her release usher in democracy in the country? One finds there are mixed feelings across the international political spectrum. Hard-core pro-democracy forces say it would be naive to expect anything positive in Myanmar today. The present system has 25 per cent of seats reserved in all legislatures for the military. Nothing can ever happen without the generals' approval. Moreover, they say, it should not be forgotten that Suu Kyi has been freed only after Myanmar's junta-backed party – Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – manipulated the elections last month winning about 80 per cent seats in the national parliament and 14 regional assemblies.

Former Canadian Secretary of State David Kilgour does not think that the release of charismatic Suu



**David Kilgour: Suu Kyi will continue to speak out**

Kyi in itself would usher in democracy. He says, "Those who follow events in Burma know the generals have been fighting the democratic wishes of the Burmese people for decades. The junta seeks always, with the help of the one party-state in Beijing, to trample on the people of Burma. On the other hand, ASSK has always sought to enhance their position, their economy and quality of living. An



**Mohan Guruswamy : Renewal of a second struggle for freedom**

icon of all across the world who believe in the rule of law, human dignity, and government of, by and for the people, she will continue to

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speak out for an authentic democracy with Burmese characteristics. No-where else on earth are so many seats reserved for the military."

Chairman and Founder of New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Alternatives Mohan Guruswamy says that with Suu Kyi's recent release it might just be a renewal of "the second struggle for freedom " in the country. It is hard to forecast how the generals of the country would behave. He recalls, " Bowing to the international pressure the generals had agreed to elections in May 1990. But when the National League for Democracy led by Suu Kyi won 392 seats and the military backed National Unity Party just 10, the junta refused to hand over power." Also, Guruswamy does not

think that the problems of Burma will be all over with the replacement of the military junta by a democracy . He fears, "a government headed by a decent soul like Suu Kyi could just be what will trigger off a break up of that country. Suu Kyi might just end up like Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, guarded day and night by foreign troops."

Noted Gandhian sociologist from Jawaharlal Nehru University Anand Kumar sees in Suu Kyi's release "a positive development in the process of the ongoing mass struggle and growing international pressure against 20 years of military repression." Kumar impresses upon the need to drive this process to its logical end and build the country which, due to its long military rule, has lost so many precious opportunities in the fields, including education, health, employment and social development. He suggests that in order to accomplish the goals of democracy and human rights in the



**Anand Kumar : Release a positive development**

country now strong nations such as India, China and America must meaningfully cooperate for peace and reconstruction in Myanmar. The people of Myanmar must remain united for peace and nation-building. All political prisoners must be freed. And finally, a national commission has to be instituted to bring the corrupt in the current dispensation in Myanmar to justice.