

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Political Drama of Suu Kyi

Three events linked to the charismatic leader of Myanmar (Burma) Aung San Suu Kyi attracted our attention this week. The first is the resistance of Suu Kyi to the repressive military junta. A few weeks ago she left home to meet her supporters and her car was stopped on a bridge. After 6 days she was forcibly sent back. Now she has ventured out again and has again been prevented from proceeding. Second we hear of the courageous action of a group of 18 young persons of many countries (East & West). Who were arrested, sentenced and deported after distributing handouts in the capital city calling for democracy in Myanmar. And third is the public support now given to Suu Kyi's struggle by a group of 26 Sri Lankans, which is also indicative of a growing concern in Sri Lanka over Suu Kyi. [A concern, we may add, which is long overdue].

Her story

The details of Suu Kyi's resistance to military rule are well-known. She is the daughter of Myanmar's freedom fighter and national hero Aung San, who was assassinated in 1947 on the eve of independence. Suu Kyi born in 1945 and educated at Oxford, married to an Englishman and with two sons, was suddenly propelled to the fore from of politics when in 1988 she returned to Myanmar to see her ailing mother. That year when the army took power promising free elections, people rallied around Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

Suu Kyi campaigned all over the country for her party, but in July 1989, she was arrested. At the elections of May 1990, the NLD had a landslide victory with 392 out of 485 seats (80%). The military regime kept Suu Kyi under house arrest where she has remained, becoming a rallying point for democracy and an internationally acclaimed fighter for the rights of the people of Myanmar.

Her supporters have been imprisoned and tortured and all demonstrations in her support have been brutally crushed. In December 1990 there were student demonstrations in Myanmar demanding her release to which the junta responded by closing colleges and universities. In 1991 she won the Nobel Peace Prize, but was not allowed receive it in Oslo. This year marks the 10th year of Suu Kyi's detention. Today she stand, a fearlessly as ever against the military dictatorship demonstrating to the world that courage is the key to her politics.

Suu Kyi has often re-iterated the need for "Freedom from Fear". She quotes Nehru that "the greatest gift for an individual or a nation is..... abhaya, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but absence of fear from the mind". As Suu Kyi herself writes:

"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. Most Burmese are familiar with the four gait, the four kinds of corruption. Chanda-gati, corruption induced by desire, is deviation from the right path in pursuit of bribes or for the sake of those one loves. Dosa-gati, is taking the wrong path to spite those against whom one bears ill will, and moga-gati is aberration due to ignorance. But perhaps the worst of the four is bhaya-gati, for not only does abhaya, fear stifle and slowly destroy all sense of right and wrong, it so often lies at the root of the other three kinds of corruption."

Challenging Tyranny

The intervention in Myanmar politics of young persons from other countries deserves our strong support. It is now recognized that where undemocratic dictatorships oppress their own citizens, the world community has an obligation to show concern. And where governments hesitate, groups of activists from around the world bring credit to the struggle for democracy by courageously taking up the issue. The Myanmar government should learn the lessons of history where peoples movement have successfully toppled long-standing dictators-Mobuto and Suharto being recent examples.

Sri Lankans join the struggle

It is heartening to note that Sri Lankan individuals from various walks of life have expressed their concern about Suu Kyi and the situation in Myanmar. The group of 26 include Professor Gananth Obeysekere, Professor Carlo Fonseka and Professor Savitri Goonesekere; lawyers Dr. Deepika Udugama, Manouri Muttettuwagama, R. K. W. Goonesekere, Suriya Wickremasinghe and Javid Yusuf, poet Ann Ranasinghe, scientist Dr. Tissa Vitharana, actress Iragani Serasinghe, former government servants V. Kanapathipillai and C. T. Jansz; journalists Sunanda Deshapriya, Marwaan Macan Markar and Lucien Rajakarunanyake; Heads of Institutes, Sunethra Bandaranaike and Godfrey Gunatilleke; political scientists Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda, Dr. Kumari Jayawardena and Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu; human rights workers Bernadeen Silva and Manel Fonseka; accountant; J. Diandas and Sarvodaya leader A.T. Ariyaratnc.

We hope that other persons and organizations will follow and mount a peoples campaign in Sri Lanka for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar. We note with dismay and concern that many distinguished Sri Lankan bhikkus were honored by the present Myanmar government and express our hope that representatives of Buddhist organizations-including bhikkus and laypersons-will now speak out in support of Suu Kyi's struggle, and will cease to have dealings with the repressive Myanmar government.

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