

AUNG SUNG SUU KYI URGES MYANMAR NATIONALS IN SG TO RETURN HOME

22 Sep 2013 - 10:59am



(AFP, 22 Sep) – Thousands of Myanmar nationals living in Singapore gave Aung San Suu Kyi an emotional welcome Sunday as the democracy icon urged them to consider coming home to help rebuild the impoverished nation.

The two-hour event, held on the third day of opposition leader Suu Kyi's first visit to the city-state, saw Myanmar nationals working or studying in the wealthy city-state turn up in traditional attire and t-shirts emblazoned with her portrait to hear her speak and put questions.

The crowd, estimated at 5,800 by organisers Myanmar Club Singapore, gave Suu Kyi a prolonged standing ovation as she entered a convention hall.

“Of course it is an emotional moment for many of us. Today, after seeing The Lady in Singapore for the first time, I feel proud to be (from) Myanmar,” said 28-year-old nurse Zaw Lei Win.

Student Myat Kaung Min said Suu Kyi in her speech in the Myanmar language urged her compatriots in Singapore to consider returning home or to “find some way” to give back to Myanmar.

“She said everyone is waiting for her to become president before returning to Burma, but that she cannot become president if we don’t come back and help,” said the 21-year-old, who has permanent residency in Singapore.

Zaw Tun Henry, the president of Myanmar Club Singapore, said 68-year-old Suu Kyi was most concerned about the future plans of Myanmar students in Singaporean universities.

In a private meeting with them before her Sunday speech, he said she urged them to return home “to give back to the mother country” after their studies.

“She said, ‘Don’t wait until there are good conditions in Myanmar, you come back and (make the) change’,” said Zaw.

There are no official statistics on the size of the Myanmar diaspora in Singapore, but Zaw said the community is about 150,000-strong.

Speaking at another event at the Singapore Management University on Sunday afternoon, Suu Kyi said she did not wish to impose on affluent and educated Myanmar nationals overseas to return home.

“It is a matter of choice...I don’t blame you because it is quite human and natural to make the most of your own life,” she said.

Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, spent more than two decades studying and working in India, Britain and the United States before returning home in 1988 to form the National League for Democracy.

The political party swept to a landslide victory in 1990 but the then-ruling military junta never recognised the result and placed Suu Kyi under house arrest.

She is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Monday, and will return to Yangon a day later.