

Noynoy' Aquino: New hope for Democracy in Asean

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Chiang Mai (Mizzima) - "People Power" finally returned to the Philippines this morning as family, supporters and colleagues of Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, and at least 500,000 Filipinos, gathered in heavy rain for his inauguration as the 15th president of the republic.

His campaign slogans of national reconciliation and fighting corruption and poverty will be key to his six years in office. Two Burmese pro-democracy activists joined the historic event; National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) general-secretary Maung Maung and foreign affairs chief Nyo Ohn Myint were among the international delegates.

"Here, on this day, ends the reign of a government that is indifferent to the complaints of the people," Aquino said during his 21-minute speech.

"There can be no reconciliation without justice," he said to the cheers of the crowds filling Quirino Grandstand in Manila, referring to his plans to set up a commission to investigate corruption, especially allegations against his immediate predecessor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, of vote-rigging and abuse of power.

His late mother, 11th president Corazon Aquino, supported Burma for a decade, but he must feel a tinge of bitterness at the absence of his late father, Benigno Aquino, Jr, who was shot dead as he exited a plane on his return from three years' exile in the United States. Sixteen men were later sentenced to life in prison over the killing. His father had served seven years in detention under president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos period before fleeing the country.

After her husband's death, Aquino led the opposition in a crusade against the abuses and excesses of Marcos' martial rule. In late 1985, when Marcos called for a snap election, Aquino challenged his regime, joining the political fray only after one million signatures urged her to run for president. When Marcos was proclaimed winner in the 1986 polls, Aquino called for massive civil disobedience against him. Filipinos rallied behind her in massive street protests involving at least two million people, eventually joined by the army in Manila, which led to Marcos fleeing to the US. The uprising is known as the People Power Revolution.

The People Power movement turned the Philippines into a democratic country.

Following the death of his mother in August last year, many people urged Benigno to run for president and using his parents' symbol of the People Power movement, Aquino's signature campaign attracted a majority of voters, helping him win by a landslide in the elections early this month.

History has returned after 24 years, and thousands of Filipinos public celebrated their realised dreams yesterday.

His foreign policy would suit democracy movements in Asian countries, Nyo Ohn Myint said. At least one of Aquino's deputies was very familiar with Burma's long democratic struggle and the two secretariat members from the NCUB would lobby him for support in the cause of democracy for Burma, he said.

His Liberal Party nominated Aung San Suu Kyi as an honorary member of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, a regional organisation of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia.

Suu Kyi's famous quote "Use your liberty to help ours" is in one of his late mother's unfinished tasks, which Burmese pro-democracy supporters hope he will take up.