

How a Vietnamese spy played the Aussies for fools



ASIAN FOCUS
INSIDE COVER
with Roger Milton

ENCOUNTERS with espionage agents are always edgy and intriguing. Aside from the thrill of a clandestine rendezvous, there is also the fact that many are rather dishy in person and often have hefty expense allowances.

Modesty and concern for my safety preclude me naming names but over the past quarter century some of my most spectacular lunches have been courtesy of the station chief of various foreign intelligence services.

Personal experience aside, the subject of spooks reared its quirky head last month in a startling way, both to the east in Vietnam and down under in Australia.

In a case that beggars belief, a suave and highly educated spy called Luong Ngoc Anh, not only took an alleged US\$20 million off the Australians, but ravished one of the country's top trade envoys.

Only now, more than 10 years later, are details of the gigantic state-backed sting unfolding in the Melbourne Magistrates Court.

Colonel Anh, whose name is pronounced "Ang", works in the Ministry of Public Security – the polite name for Vietnam's national intelligence agency – and he has political connections right up to the Politburo level.

Although a poor country boy by birth his natural abilities set him apart

and, after being spotted by cadres in the ruling Communist Party, he was sent off to study at Melbourne's Monash University.

He focused on communication technology, and after returning to Hanoi, his spymasters helped him set up a front organisation called the Company For Technology & Development.

Its purpose, aside from gathering data on other countries, was to attract foreign investment in sensitive sectors like banking, defence services and information technology.

Anh excelled in all these areas, but his greatest coup came when he met the senior trade representative for Australia, a blonde bombshell called Elizabeth Masamune.

Soon after she was posted to Hanoi in June 1999, she met Anh, who quickly appreciated the delectable opportunities she offered.

He showered her with gifts, including perfume, a DVD player and a television, according to court disclosures, and he had Masamune between the sheets before you could say "Strewth, what a ripper!"

At that time, as Masamune admitted in court last month, she was "having problems in my marriage and I liked Anh". He had more than sex on his mind, however.

He knew Masamune's career hinged on winning contracts for Australian companies in Vietnam and he knew he could persuade his ministry to steer some deals her way.

Because of the kudos such deals would bring

her, he knew that she would be even more beholden to him.

Plus, he knew that she had access to classified Australian government briefings that his intel chiefs would love to learn about.

Most piquant of all, he knew that he could ask for a meaty commission on any of the deals he lined up for Masamune.

His big pay-off came when Securrency, a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of Australia, made a bid for a contract to print new plastic banknotes for Vietnam.

Anh told Masamune that he could ensure Securrency got the contract, but that they would have to pay him a little sweetener first.

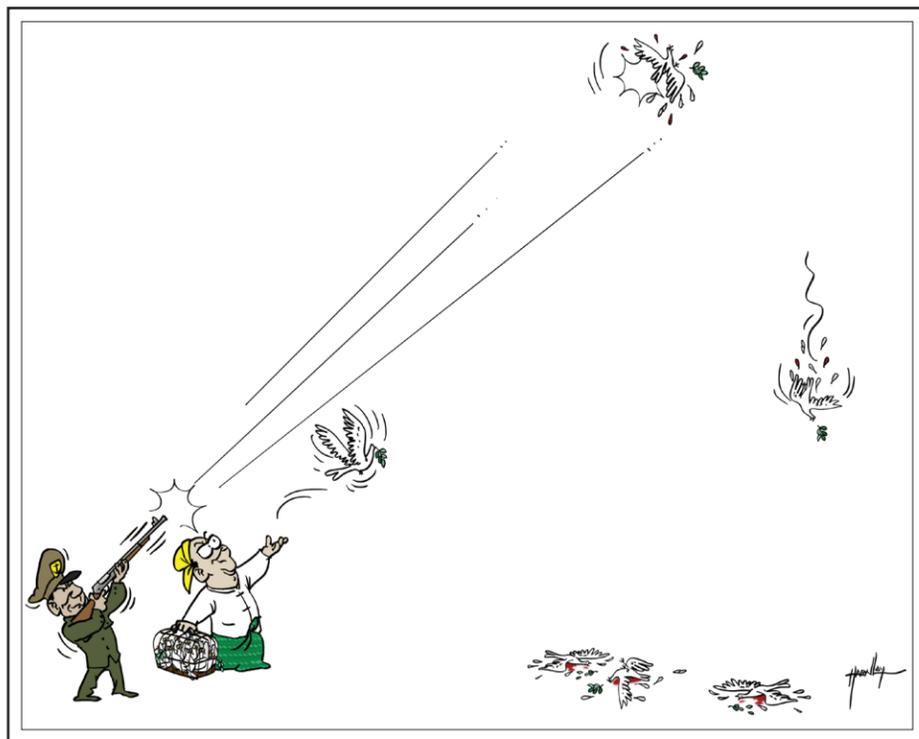
Relaying this to Securrency, the enraptured trade envoy said this was the price of doing business in Vietnam – and so the company, according to police allegations, paid around \$20 million in bribes to Anh.

More perplexing than the way an Australian government-linked company would consider making illicit payments of such magnitude is the fact that Canberra knew Anh was a spy long before he met Masamune.

Well, to cut to the chase: Securrency got the contract, Masamune got a performance bonus, Anh got his hefty "tip" – and possibly, although we will never know for sure, some secret information.

Masamune has now been taken to court, but none of her superiors in the ministry or the intelligence services has yet been summoned.

No action, of course, has been taken against Anh.



Don't dodge ethnic grievances, Daw Suu

By Nehginpao Kipgen

DAW Aung San Suu Kyi has been received with warmth and enthusiasm on her 17-day visit to the United States, which began on September 17. Her years of perseverance and dedication to the cause of democracy have deservedly earned such recognition.

The thought of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi receiving a standing ovation from members of the US Congress and holding a meeting with a US president at the White House seemed unlikely until just a few months ago.

As Myanmar progresses with its democratic reforms, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will have to manage the high expectations of her. In the history of the country's democracy movement, two statements, one from the National League for Democracy and another from her father, continue to linger in the minds of the people of Myanmar, especially ethnic minorities.

The statement, "If Burma receives one kyat, you will also get one kyat," was made in the year before the country's independence in January 1948. Bogyoke Aung San, founder of the Burmese Independence Army and father of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, said these historic words in an attempt to convince other nationalities to join what would become the Union of Burma.

The objective of the statement was to guarantee equal rights for all nationalities in the newly independent Burma, regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds.

That assurance convinced the Chin, the Kachin, and the Shan leaders to sign the Panglong Agreement on February 12, 1947 and join the interim government led by General Aung San. The day is still observed each year as the country's Union Day.

However, 60 years after independence, the grievances of ethnic minorities remain mostly unresolved. In the past 18 months ceasefires have been reached with most of the armed ethnic groups but tension remains high in some areas, particularly in the Kachin state. The core issue of autonomy is also uncertain.

In a commencement address delivered on her behalf to American University in Washington in 1997, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said: "Please use your liberty to promote ours." The objective was to garner the support of the international community.

During her recent tour to the US, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was asked on minority

NLD has a majority in the national parliament.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's apparent reticence could encourage the country's ethnic minorities to question her leadership and credibility. As she once famously implored others, she must use her freedom to promote the freedom of others and stress the need for equality of rights for all ethnic nationalities, as her late father envisaged.

The US government's recent decision to lift more economic sanctions should give a new impetus to both the U Thein Sein government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi-led opposition to address ethnic conflict and human rights violations in minority territories.

A democracy that does not resolve minority problems will not bring durable peace and stability to Myanmar. Building mutual trust is essential to strengthen the relationship between the majority Burman and the minority groups.

As the daughter of General Aung San and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and because of her connections with the Western world and her relentless commitment to the pursuit of democracy and human rights, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has a level of respect that no contemporary politician in Myanmar enjoys. She must use this unique position to win the hearts and minds of ethnic minorities in order to build a unified and vibrant multi-ethnic society.

(Nehginpao Kipgen is general secretary of the United States-based Kuki International Forum. His research interests include political transition, democratisation, human rights, ethnic conflict and identity politics and he has written numerous peer-reviewed and non-academic articles on the politics of Myanmar and Asia.)

'A democracy that does not resolve minority problems will not bring durable peace and stability to Myanmar.'

issues, particularly in Kachin and Rakhine states. In similar responses she emphasised the need for rule of law but refrained from condemning the Myanmar military.

The majority-minority issue has plagued Burma's post-independence era and ethnic minorities have accused the majority group of adopting a Burmanisation policy and exhibiting Burman chauvinism.

As someone who receives almost unflinching support from ethnic minorities, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi needs to speak up on the problems minorities face. The issue cannot wait until she becomes head of the national government or when her



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