

Several founder members of the junta's new political party, the USDP, were responsible for the ambush on Suu Kyi's convoy in Depayin in 2003.

Several of the Burmese junta officials who recently resigned their military positions to found the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were responsible for the deadly ambush on pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her convoy in Depayin, Sagaing Division, in 2003.

About 5,000 armed thugs recruited from rural areas under the authority of the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) ambushed Suu Kyi's convoy in the evening of May 30, 2003, and killed an estimated 100 people, according to independent observers. Suu Kyi narrowly escaped with her life.



USDP leaders together: Burma's Prime Minister Thein Sein (left) talks with Aung Thaung (center) and Rangoon Mayor Aung Thein Linn in Mandalay on April 29. (Photo: AP)

Since the massacre, several of those involved in the incident have been promoted, have established close business relations with the junta or, in at least one case, have married their family members into the military elite.

Former Lt-Col Aung Thaung, a hardline minister who was a USDA leader in 2003, has seen his business interests grow exponentially since the Depayin Massacre. His family's IGE Co Ltd is now one of wealthiest and most diverse companies in the country with interests in banking, pipeline construction, exporting and logging.

Nowadays, he is not only personally close to Than Shwe, but also to junta No. 2 Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye. One of his sons is married to Maung Aye's daughter. Aung Thaung is the current minister of Industry-1, but is expected to lead the USDP in this year's general election along with Prime Minister Thein Sein.

Another hardliner, Minister of Information Kyaw Hsan has also seen his star rise since he was the leader of the USDA in Sagaing Division at the time of the Depayin attack. He is now head of the junta's Spoke Authoritative Team and a powerful leader within the newly formed USDP.

The commander of Northwestern Regional Military Command in 2003 is the current minister of Hotels and Tourism Soe Naing. Both Kyaw Hsan and Soe Naing were among the more than 20 ministers who resigned from their military posts to become founder members of the USDP.

Perhaps the highest rising "butcher" of Depayin was Gen Soe Win. As secretary-2 of the junta in 2003, it is believed he ordered the attack on Suu Kyi's convoy without the knowledge of the Military Intelligence Service, which was led by Gen Khin Nyunt. Local sources in Sagaing Division have said that Soe Win commanded the attack from the headquarters of the Northwestern Regional Military Command.

Soe Win died of leukemia in October 2007, but not before serving as Burma's prime minister, personally appointed by Than Shwe, from 2004-07.

Another military commander accused of playing a role in the Depayin Massacre is the 2003 commander of the Central Regional Military Command Lt-Gen Ye Myint who is now the junta's chief negotiator with the ethnic cease-fire groups, as well as heading Military Affairs Security. Ye Myint however, has not been named as a member of the USDP.

A Depayin survivor, Tin Oo, who is the deputy chairman of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, recently told foreign broadcasters that he witnessed several groups of about 50 persons per group moving in to attack the convoy on May 30.