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Free all political prisoners, free Burma.

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The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22492&page=1>

NLD Decides to Re-register, Compete in Coming Elections

By Wai Moe Friday, November 18, 2011



Aung San Suu Kyi waves to supporters as she leaves the NLD's headquarters in Rangoon, where the party decided on Friday to re-register to run in upcoming by-elections. (Photo: AP)

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Burmese pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, has decided unanimously to re-register as a political party to run in upcoming by-elections.

The NLD's Central Committee announced the decision to re-register and compete for all available seats in the by-elections following a meeting at the party's headquarters in Rangoon on Friday.

"Frankly, I supported party re-registration. For the elections, I want to compete in all vacant seats rather than just three seats, for the sake of people," Suu Kyi said shortly after party representatives from 14 states and regions reached their decision.

In a speech delivered at the opening of the meeting, Suu Kyi said she encouraged party members to decide the party's future democratically and urged members to accept the majority decision.

"Democracy means we have to follow and respect the majority's decision, whether we like it or not," Suu Kyi told key members of the NLD. "In the democratic process, sometimes we win and sometimes we lose. We have to accept it."

"I do not want the way party members to decide based on my decision," she added.

She also spoke about the NLD's future efforts to amend the country's 2008 Constitution, which was drafted by a military-controlled National Convention and includes provisions guaranteeing the armed forces a dominant role in Burmese politics.

"Looking ahead, we must work to amend the Constitution," she said. "We must do this not only for the sake of the NLD, but for the whole country and the whole union. We must amend any laws that are not for the benefit of the country."

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Suu Kyi also said that it was acceptable to register the party under the current circumstances because the government has recognized the result of the 1990 elections, which the NLD won by a landslide.

The reaction to the NLD's decision has been mostly positive, with Burmese activists and observers saying they respected and welcomed the move as a step forward following recent confidence-building between the opposition and President Thein Sein's government.

"We respect their democratic decision to register the party. But two key issues for national reconciliation still have to be resolved: the release of all political prisoners and an end to hostilities in ethnic areas," said Thein Than Tun, a former political prisoner and member of the influential 88 Generation Students group who was freed in October as part of an amnesty that saw the release of around 200 political detainees.

"It is the answer nearly all people want to hear," said Chit Win Maung, the editor of Yananthit, a Rangoon-based Chit Win Maung said he thought that Burma's democratization process would not be like that of other countries such as Russia, Indonesia, Iraq, Egypt and Libya.

"There may be a period of chaos or clashes between groups [in Burma], but I think the transition will be smooth, even though there are still many issues that need to be resolved," he said.

Despite the NLD's decision to register, however, allied ethnic parties such as the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the Arakan League for Democracy, the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) and the Zomi National Congress, said that they will wait until ethnic leaders are released before registering.

"Ethnic leaders such as U Hkun Htun Oo [of the SNLD] are still in prison. If we register our party before their release, it would look like we are ignoring them. We will discuss party registration after ethnic leaders are released," said Nai Ngwe Thein, the vice-chairman of the MNDF.

Meanwhile, the Burmese authorities are transferring political prisoners, including Hkun Htun Oo and other prominent figures such as 88 Generation Students group leader Min Ko Naing and Ashin Gambira, a leader of the 2007 monk-led Saffron Revolution, from one prison to another.

Min Ko Naing's family attempted to visit him at Rangoon's Insein Prison on Friday after he arrived at the prison on Thursday, but prison officials told the family that he was moved another prison today.

"Ko Min Ko Naing will likely be moved to Thayet Prison in Magway Division. And Ashin Gambira was transferred again from Insein to Myaungmya Prison in Irrawaddy Division," said Thein Than Tun. "There is no sign of any plans to release more political prisoners yet."

The NLD's decision in Rangoon was not the only major development related to Burma today.

In Bali, Indonesia, where the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) is holding its 19th summit, US President Barack Obama announced that he will send Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Burma next month.

Obama, who is in Bali to attend the Asean-US Leaders Meeting, said he made the decision after speaking with Suu Kyi by phone on Thursday night. The move also follows Asean's decision on Thursday to grant the regional grouping's 2014 chairmanship to Burma.

"Last night, I spoke to Aung San Suu Kyi, directly, and confirmed that she supports American engagement to move this process forward. So today, I've asked Secretary Hillary Clinton to go to Burma," Obama said in his statement.

"She will be the first American Secretary of State to travel to the country in over half a century, and she will explore whether the United States can empower a positive transition in Burma and begin a new chapter between our countries," said Obama, who was scheduled to meet later on Friday with Asean leaders, including Burmese President Thein Sein.

Citing several recent developments in Burma, including dialogue between the government and Suu Kyi, the release of some political prisoners and the relaxation of media restrictions, Obama said there has been a "flicker of progress" in the last several weeks, but added that much more needs to be done.

"We remain concerned about Burma's closed political system, its treatment of minorities and holding of political prisoners, and its relationship with North Korea," Obama said.

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, Sun, 20. Nov 2011

The Nation (Thailand) - <<http://www.asianewsnet.net/home/news.php?id=24059&sec=3>>

Great expectations as Burma backed for Asean chair

Editorial Desk - Publication Date : 20-11-2011

Finally, Asean leaders have given Burma the green light to assume the group's rotating chair, an honour the country skipped in 2006. Endorsing Burma's long-awaited plan on Wednesday, it became clear the group's foreign ministers

would rubber stamp the proposal the following day.

It was a huge triumph for the Burmese leaders, especially those in army uniforms who have oppressed their people continuously for the past two decades.

For strongman General Than Shwe, this is the ultimate vindication of his past political schemes and manoeuvres. For President Thein Sein, it is insurance that he will be able to lead Burma and continue with the ongoing reforms, strengthening his grip as well as the country's integration with the Asean community.

Surprisingly, the different views expressed by the various dialogue partners at the Bali summit, especially the US, provided additional incentive to endorse Burma's chairmanship. Both the US and the EU have expressed a degree of satisfaction with the reforms taking place in Burma.

Asean does not want to give the impression that it and Burma have yielded to the consistent pressure from the West; they are doing it for their own good.

The group's decision on this issue and the trust it has placed in the current administration in Burma means the next two years will be crucial for Asean; any change that halts or restricts the ongoing reforms would do serious damage to its credibility.

Since its admission to the group in 1997, Burma has largely failed to comply with requests from Asean. However, progress has been made since the flawed poll in November last year, which ushered in nominal parliamentary rule. Dialogue between Thein Sein and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi kicked off a series of reforms, which have led to stronger commitment to change.

Suu Kyi's positive responses have kept the momentum going along with the release of political prisoners. The West has demanded that all of them must be released. But nobody knows for sure how many are imprisoned.

Reconciliation with ethnic groups has become secondary due to its complexity. The current political landscape and the relations between major powers dictate that Burma must be further integrated with Asean. At the moment, the grouping needs to further consolidate in the face of expanded engagements with its powerful dialogue partners.

When Burma was first admitted, it was due to fear of China's influence inside the country. Now, Burma has been granted the Asean chair in 2014, because of the desire to realise the Asean Economic Community the following year. Burma was the last piece of the jigsaw of regional unity.

Now, Asean leaders are working on strict criteria to admit new members so that they will not face unintended consequences that arose in Burma's case. That helps explain why East Timor's bid for membership has to wait.

It is hoped that the reforms in Burma will intensify and cover the whole gamut of society. The Burmese people are very resilient and self-sufficient. Like other oppressed peoples around the world, when granted a measure of freedom, their voices will be heard, more and more strongly. It is they who will determine the country's future

Between news <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSKJ A hope for Myanmar not to reverse its progress in democracy, Wed, 23. Nov 2011

Between - November 23, 2011 <<http://www.betweenonline.com/news-article/a-hope-for-myanmar-not-to-reverse-its-progress-in-democracy>>

A hope for Myanmar not to reverse its progress in democracy - By **Between News**

It is hoped by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that Myanmar not to reverse its progress in democracy as it will chair the bloc in 2014, a top official said here on Tuesday.

ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan in a briefing of the post 19th ASEAN Summit and the 6th East Asia Summit said that everybody emphasized that Myanmar has been good so far. The hope is that there would be no reversal of this evolution. Changes in the future should be more open for reconciliation and more peace to integration inside.

Other parties and countries should help the process in Myanmar so that it could be a more democratic nation, Pitsuwan said.

Adding that it would help Myanmar out of isolation and has more effective integration with ASEAN, Pitsuwan further said, "We do agree that we must help this process in every way that we could together. Group of nations should also make adjustment. We help it open its door and space. I hope the momentum is on and I hope that space would be open wider for everyone."

The general sentiment is very clear on Myanmar according to Pitsuwan.

In following the road to democracy, there is no reverse for Myanmar. Watching her grow, other players will make

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Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General, ASEAN. @maggiechenau

contribution. This begins with the United States Secretary Hillary Clinton who makes an official visit to Myanmar on December 1 (to observe the situation) and this would be a momentous event. Pitsuwan said, this would be followed by Japan, European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank. The foregoing news is sourced from Xinhua.

The Irrawaddy Today's Newsletter for Monday, November 21, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22505>

KNU and SSA-South Informally Agree Ceasefire with Govt.-

By **SAW YAN NAING** Monday, November 21, 2011



SSA-South chief Lt-Gen Yawdserk, centre-left, shakes hands with Burmese Minister for Railways Aung Min (Photo: taifreedom.com)

Five ethnic armed groups, including two major Karen and Shan rebel organizations, held peace talks with a Naypyidaw delegation at the Thai-Burmese border on Saturday and three informally agreed a ceasefire, according to sources.

The Karen National Union (KNU) and Shan State Army-South (SSA-South) met with a Burmese government delegation led by Aung Min, the minister for railways, who was sent by President Thein Sein.

"We talked about peace. We asked what was the role for ethnic armed groups in the government's peace process," said Maj Sai Lao Hseng, a spokesperson for the SSA-South.

"The Minister, Aung Min, explained to us that there are three steps toward the emergence of peace—a ceasefire, cooperation between ceasefire groups and Naypyidaw for development, and a meeting hosted by the government to tackle unsolved political conflicts," he added.

Other ethnic armed groups present at the talks were the Kachin Independence Organization, Karenni National Progressive Party and Chin National Front (CNF), with only the CNF joining the SSA-South and KNU in informally agreeing to a ceasefire.

Led by SSA-South chief Lt-Gen Yawdserk, the ethnic Shan representatives proposed a four point plan comprising the cessation of hostilities, political negotiations, setting up of a special development zone and cooperation for the eradication of drugs.

"We told them that a peaceful solution for conflicts by political means, joint cooperation with the government for development and drug eradication are needed. The government representatives will firstly consider a ceasefire as the initial step," said Sai Lao Hseng.

There were also some individual participants such as Nay Win Maung of Myanmar Egress, Burmese academics Dr Kyaw Yin Hlaing and Tin Maung Than as well as Harn Yawngwe, executive director of the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office.

The role of Myanmar Egress and other participants is to cooperate with Aung Min to help the peace process go smoothly, said Kyaw Yin Hlaing.

"Minister U Aung Min said the initiative is genuine and is hoped to be heading towards sustainable peace," he told The Irrawaddy on Monday.

"U Aung Min said that previous ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed groups were made only by former top military generals. But these current talks are intended in the interests of civilians," added Kyaw Yin Hlaing.

A separate meeting was also held between the KNU and the government delegation. The Karen ethnic armed group was represented by Gen Mutu Say Poe, chief of the rebel's military wing the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and two KNU central committee members, Saw David Taw and Saw Ah Toe.

Saw Ah Toe told The Irrawaddy on Monday: "We talked informally about four points. First we will start with a ceasefire. We will talk later about political affairs. If we completely succeed with the ceasefire, we will hold a meeting about political dialogue."

He said that there were no signed agreements between the government delegation and the KNU representatives, but they verbally agreed to have further talks.

"They want to know and understand what we want. It is the first step following talks," said Saw Ah Toe.

The move came after the KNU recently formed a "Committee for the Emergence of Peace" comprised of seven leading figures from the KNU and KNLA.

According to government sources, ceasefire talks are planned at state level with political dialogues between Naypyidaw and ethnic armed groups to take place at division level.

"Burma News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 23 November 2011, Wed, 23. Nov 2011 21:32:19

UCAnews - ucanews.com reporter, Yangon, Myanmar **November 22, 2011** - <<http://www.ucanews.com/2011/11/22/greater-youth-role-encourages-suu-kyi/>>

Greater youth role encourages Suu Kyi



Aung San Suu Kyi addressing the fair

Improving education vital to take the country forward, opposition leader says

Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi says participation by the young in national life is encouraging but a good education is vital so that they can spur development and take the country forward.

"It gives me great strength to see young people taking a leading role in all activities in the country," she told more than 1,000 people gathered at a fair yesterday marking the first anniversary of the Education under Democracy Movement network which she heads.

"We are now in a critical situation and making the right decisions is vital at this moment. We know clearly what is

right and with resolution we will continue to work on this, she told them during the fair at the Judson Church Center in

Yangon.

"We understand our differences and we are listening to different ideas. But we need to clearly walk on the road which we think it is right even we realize it could be risky," added the opposition leader who announced earlier this week she will be running in upcoming by-elections.

She urged those gathered to use their abilities and strengths for the good of others and to cooperate with each other.

"Older people need to guide and share their knowledge and experience with the young who in turn must be willing to learn from the old," she said.

Education is essential for the development of the country, she pointed out adding that she wants education in Myanmar to progress so it meets international standards.

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, Sat, 05. Nov 2011

Voice of America – (VOA) - November 04, 2011-

US Envoys See 'Encouraging Steps, Signs' in Burma -

David Gollust | State Department <<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/asia/east-pacific/US-Envoys-See-Encouraging-Steps-Signs-in-Burma-133280458.html>>



Burma's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi meets with the new U.S. special envoy to Myanmar Derek Mitchell (C) and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy Human Rights and Labor Michael Posner (L) at her home in Yangon, Burma, November 4, 2011.

Senior U.S. State Department officials who visited Burma this week say they had constructive meetings with leaders of the new civilian government and the Burmese military. They say the United States is prepared to reciprocate for Burmese reform steps by easing restrictions on the reclusive East Asian country.

The three-day visit by State Department human rights chief Michael Posner and special envoy for Burma, Derek Mitchell, was the latest step in an accelerating U.S.-Burmese dialogue, and both said they are encouraged by reform steps by the new nominally-civilian government..
new nominally-civilian government..

that the new government, which took power in late March after decades of military rule, would bring meaningful change. The United States was skeptical

However Mitchell and Posner, in comments to reporters Friday at the U.S. embassy in Rangoon, also disclosed here, said reform moves by the new authorities appear to reflect the beginning of a transition that the United States welcomes.

Among other things, the Burmese government has released about 200 political prisoners, and advanced an election law that would legalize opposition parties including Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's formerly-banned National League for Democracy.

Posner and Mitchell met with a range of senior Burmese government officials including the country's military chief of staff in the new capital Nay Pyi Taw, and went on to Rangoon to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and other political and human rights activists.

Briefing reporters here, State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Posner pressed authorities to free all the country's estimated 1,800 remaining political prisoners, and that the assistant secretary of state for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor raised specific cases.

"All political prisoners should be released. There was some lack of transparency at least, in our view, in terms of who has already been released and who remains in custody," said Nuland. "So this was Assistant Secretary Posner's first trip to Burma, and it was his chance to actually sit down with them and get a better sense of who has been released, to talk to them about first of all the general principle that they should all be released, but also talk about additional particular cases of concern."

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Posner and Mitchell said the United States is loosening travel restrictions, allowing Burmese Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin to visit Washington earlier this month.

They said the Obama administration also is considering expanding small agricultural and micro-finance aid programs, but that a further easing of relations will depend on what Mitchell termed "concrete changes" by the Burmese.

He said if there is evidence of genuine reform, the United States "will be partners in that effort," though noting that the lifting of key sanctions, including a law barring U.S. support for international loans to Burma, would require action by the U.S. Congress.

Burma News - 03 November 2011, "BurmaNews" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Fri, 04. Nov 2011 04:07:29

International Monetary Fund - (IMF) - <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2011/pr11392.htm>>

Statement at the Conclusion of the Article VIII Mission to Myanmar - Press Release No. 11/392 - November 2, 2011 -

The following statement was issued today in Nay Pyi Taw, after the conclusion of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article VIII mission to Myanmar:

"A team from the Monetary and Capital Markets, Legal, and Asia and Pacific Departments of the IMF visited Myanmar during October 19–November 1, 2011, at the request of the Central Bank of Myanmar to discuss its plans to unify the exchange rate regime and lift restrictions on current international payments and transfers with the intention of accepting Myanmar's obligations under Article VIII, Sections 2(a), 3 and 4 of the IMF's Articles of Agreement. IMF members accepting the obligations of Article VIII undertake to refrain from imposing exchange restrictions on the making of payments and transfers for current international transactions or from engaging in discriminatory currency arrangements or multiple currency practices without IMF approval.

"The team met with government officials, banks, and public and private sector representatives to conduct an initial diagnostic assessment of the legal framework and actual market practices governing the exchange rate system of Myanmar and, in particular, the existing exchange restrictions and multiple currency practices. The mission team would like to thank their counterparts for their cooperation and productive engagement.

"The the team will continue its work from the IMF Headquarters in cooperation with Myanmar authorities as they formulate their policies towards accepting the obligations of Article VIII. The team expects to visit Myanmar again for a follow up mission in early 2012.

The Irrawaddy, Newsletter for November 2, 2011, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - COMMENTARY - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22370&page=1>

Give Suu Kyi a Blank Check - By AUNG ZAW Wednesday, November 2, 2011

In early November 2010, Burma held a sham general election while Aung San Suu Kyi was still under house arrest, and even if she had been free the country's Political Parties Registration Law would have prohibited her from running for a seat in the military- and ex-military-dominated Parliament.

In contrast, last week Burma's Parliament passed amendments to the Political Parties Registration Law that would allow both Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), to legally participate in the political process. Moreover, President Thein Sein appears to be seeking what may be the ultimate stamp of legitimacy for his new government by actively attempting to persuade Suu Kyi to register the NLD and run for office.

On Sunday, Suu Kyi held her fourth meeting in as many months with Labor Minister Aung Kyi—the government's liaison to the opposition leader—during which they reportedly discussed both the Political Parties Registration Law amendments and a wide range of the country's most pressing issues, including the conditions surrounding an amnesty, peace talks with ethnic armed groups and economic and financial matters.

Following the meeting, the pro-democracy leader was upbeat and said that in the coming days she will hold a series of meetings with NLD leaders, ethnic leaders and other opposition allies. When asked if the NLD would register, however, Suu Kyi kept her cards close to her vest. "Once we see the law, then we will hold a party meeting and decide whether or not we will register," she said.



Aung Zaw is founder and editor of the Irrawaddy magazine. He can be reached at aungzaw@irrawaddy.org.

Reading between the lines, Suu Kyi was saying that if the negotiations taking place over the details of the Political Parties Registration Law and the other major issues being discussed result in terms acceptable to her and the NLD, then the party will re-register and contest in future elections, including the upcoming by-election for seats vacated—mostly by MPs joining Thein Sein's administration—since the November 2010 election.

To the dismay of critics and observers who just a few months earlier dismissed her relevance and ability to lead, Suu Kyi is now more influential and popular than ever, and both Thein Sein and major international players such as the US have clearly acknowledged her as the main opposition leader. This was confirmed in spades by her one-on-one meeting with Thein Sein in August, and reconfirmed by her latest meeting with his liaison, as well as the government's not so subtle attempt to court her into the formal political process.

Suu Kyi is well aware of the factions and rivalries within the Burmese government and clearly sees Thein Sein as the horse to place her bet on. This was reflected in an article in the Wall Street Journal, where she said she believes the president is honest and straightforward.

This perception did not happen immediately after the new government was formed; it took time to emerge over a period of mutual confidence building. Suu Kyi was first allowed a minor personal excursion to Bagan, during which she took pains to not be too overtly political or do anything to unleash a backlash from government hard-liners.

On July 19, Thein Sein's government allowed Suu Kyi even more leeway when it permitted her and some 2,000 people to march from NLD headquarters to the Martyr's Day ceremony, where police officials did not intervene and actually helped facilitate the biggest public opposition gathering since the 2007 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. Then on August 14, Suu Kyi was allowed to travel to Pegu and meet with supporters. In both instances, Suu Kyi kept things low-key and did not take advantage of the situation by stirring the crowd into any kind of anti-government frenzy, although she clearly could have done so if she had wanted to.

After Martyr's Day, the meetings between Suu Kyi and government minister Aung Mye Thaw resumed, and Suu Kyi saw a perceptible difference in her interactions with the new government versus the old military junta. Under the previous regime, Aung Mye Thaw was merely a messenger of the senior generals. But to Suu Kyi's delight, this time he was given more authority to speak on behalf of the government and brought decent proposals on the key issues to be discussed, including the release of political prisoners.

Suu Kyi was even more pleasantly surprised when Thein Sein invited her to visit to Naypyidaw to meet with him and attend a government-sponsored economic forum.

A key player who deserves at least some credit for the meeting and the improved relations is respected economist U Myint, who despite having played guitar along with Suu Kyi's son at NLD headquarters after Suu Kyi was released, was appointed to be the chief economic advisor to the president.

The irony is that no foreign envoy played a major role in breaking the ice between the two camps—it was a homegrown initiative that came from the mutual desire of both sides wanting to sit down and talk.

Suu Kyi was probably, and rightfully, skeptical at first. After all, she had been invited several times in the past to meet with key regime leaders, including the former junta chief, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, and each time she had later ended up back under house arrest. But despite being known as a vague politician beholden to Than Shwe, the more personal style of Thein Sein undoubtedly helped set Suu Kyi more at ease.

During her visit to Naypyidaw, Thein Sein's wife, Khin Khin Win, even held a non-pretentious family dinner for Suu Kyi that included good-natured and candid conversation, according to informed government sources. This was quite a contrast from Suu Kyi's previous experience with the wives of Burmese generals, many of whom were notoriously corrupt and haughty and held open animosity towards the pro-democracy leader.

In Burma, personal relationships play a big part in discussions between opposing parties, and Suu Kyi has been extremely positive since her cordial visit with Thein Sein in Naypyidaw. She seems convinced that changes are coming to Burma and it is time to take a chance—and that the best way she can contribute to the peace and prosperity of the nation is to participate in the process of political transition.

The Burmese government's embrace of Suu Kyi—along with steps such as releasing a number of political prisoners, relaxing restrictions on the press and suspending the Myitsone Dam project—has turned the recently isolated country that was known as a pariah state into a diplomatic hotspot.

Indonesia currently holds the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), a chair which Burma would like to assume in 2014, and Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa just visited Burma on a fact-finding mission. After the foreign minister's three-day visit, he said that Naypyidaw's political reforms look "irreversible" and added that he believed the process would continue, but said more changes need to take place before Burma assumes the Asean chair.

The Burmese government is also keen to improve relations with the US in order to counterbalance China's influence, and

to get US sanctions lifted or significantly reduced. The US assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, Michael Posner, and the US coordinator for policy on Burma, Derek Mitchell, will arrive in Naypyidaw to Aung San Suu Kyi to Run for Burma Parliament day. It will be Mitchell's third visit in two months, and he has previously said that if Burma takes concrete actions towards real reform, the US will reciprocate in kind.

European support, particularly from certain EU members, has been actively solicited by the new Burmese government as well. Norway's deputy foreign minister concluded a visit to Burma a few weeks ago and now the Norwegian international development minister is in town. In addition, Harn Yawng hwe, the director of the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office, just concluded a trip to Burma that included a flurry of meetings with government and opposition leaders.

The UN—whose special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma has recommended a Commission of Inquiry into crimes against humanity in Burma—also has its special envoy in country, with Vijay Nambiar currently in Rangoon for his second visit this year.

So with Asean, the US, Europe and the UN all represented in Burma at virtually the same time—a time when Suu Kyi is actively engaged in discussions with the government regarding her potentially joining the formal political process—what does the revolving door of diplomats denote?

Are they all in Burma just to keep tabs on the situation? Or are they there to both encourage the “reform” process and push the Burmese leaders to quickly make it more concrete and irreversible?

With Burma's by-elections and an Asean meeting upcoming, and with the US about to turn the corner into an election year, it seems that now may be the time that the preliminary small-talk has stopped and the major players have sat down for serious negotiations over the top issues of concern to all sides.

If so, then this may be the best chance that Suu Kyi has to force Thein Sein and his new government allies to put their cards on the table and show how serious they are about meaningful and irreversible reform.

Given the internal rivalries and the possibility that the balance of power could tip back towards the hard-liners if Thein Sein and his reformist group falters, some political analysts have argued that Thein Sein should receive sufficient support from inside and outside of Burma to strengthen both his reform agenda and his internal power without expecting him to give too much in return at this point.

Others disagree, however, suspecting that the government is attempting to increase its legitimacy and obtain international concessions while making only small changes around the edge while maintaining firm control at the center.

Suu Kyi is aware of the arguments on both sides and of the pitfalls of taking one position or the other. But despite her improved relations with the government and their open attempts to woo her, she must maintain her role as the main opposition figure and maximize this opportunity for the benefit of all the people of Burma, including the country's diverse ethnic groups.

Suu Kyi has received significant support from ethnic groups since her release from house arrest in November and, like her father, she will not betray her ethnic allies. Their issues, including the ongoing armed conflicts, have been one of her top agenda items when meeting with government officials, and she seems committed to following through on her offer to act as a peace broker between the government and ethnic groups.

Since Suu Kyi's release from house arrest, there has been an ongoing debate about whether she should remain as head of the NLD or leave the party and become a national figure without allegiance to one particular organization, allowing her to lead the effort towards national reconciliation by being an independent player in a position to bridge the gaps between all stakeholders. Suu Kyi is also aware of shortcomings in the NLD and the need for reform, so it won't be surprising if in the future she delegates more authority and power to a younger generation of respected leaders, some of whom may currently be outside the NLD fold. There has even been a rumor that she has been offered a government position, but has turned it down.

However, regardless of what Suu Kyi chooses to do about her NLD affiliation in the future, or whether she decides to run for office or stay outside the day-to-day political fray, what is now necessary is that the positive energy between the government and opposition camps be used to bring about real change that will have a significant impact on the lives of the people of Burma.

The many political dissidents still in prison, the ethnic soldiers fighting in the jungle, those suffering from human rights abuses such as rape and forced labor, refugees and displaced people along the border and all the people struggling just to survive in Burma deserve a better future, and they have already placed their faith in Suu Kyi as their leader and the chief negotiator on their behalf.

What will be required is a combination of goodwill and pragmatism together with tough resolve and an unflinching negotiating strategy regarding key issues. In order to obtain the best results, both the Burmese people and the international community need to speak with one voice. Suu Kyi is that voice, and she should be given both our full

support and a blank check to cut the best deal possible under the current circumstances—which all signs indicate could, if the negotiations are handled properly, be a good one for the people of Burma.

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Suu Kyi Says End of Sanctions Depends on Govt

By THE IRRAWADDY Monday, November 14, 2011



Aung San Suu Kyi speaking at her press conference on Monday, November 14, 2011. (Photo: The Irrawaddy)

Burma's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi said at a press conference on Monday that the end of Western economic sanctions depends on the degree of political and human rights progress the country's quasi-civilian government makes.

She said that the foreign nations which have imposed sanctions, including the US and the EU bloc, must view significant progress before they are lifted.

Suu Kyi's press conference, held at the headquarters of her National League for Democracy (NLD) in Rangoon, marked the one-year anniversary of her release from house arrest. Her remarks made clear that Burma has yet to reach the stage that its people are confident that the country is on the path to true democracy.

"There has been some progress within the past year, but not enough yet," she said. "A crucial issue is the rule of law, without which we cannot make progress in the issues of human rights, the release of political prisoners, domestic peace efforts or social and economic development in our country."

She also called for a clean government and a fair judiciary to found a democratic nation, stressing that in the continued absence of the rule of law, Burma will not be able to attract foreign investment.

But she also reaffirmed her optimism about developments under Burma's new government—which took office through a heavily-rigged election in Nov. 2010—and urged the country's public to be realistic under the changing circumstances.

Aung San Suu Kyi to Run for Burma Parliament

"We need optimistic views and ideas. We have to change our views at a point when they need to change. Based on our beliefs, we also have to take risks at the appropriate time," she said, hinting at the growing possibility that the NLD may re-register under the recently amended Political Parties RegGesandte der USA sehen „Zeichen ermutigender Schritte“ in Burmaistration Law and she may run in the coming parliamentary by-elections.

At the press conference, however, Suu Kyi did not make any public announcement or state her opinion about whether the NLD should re-register and contest the parliamentary elections.

Suu Kyi also appealed to members of the Burmese military for solidarity with the public and asked both to work together towards the goal of establishing democracy in Burma.

"All the army members are also the country's citizens. So are all of us. If all of us are the same public, then I wish to ask why we can't work together. We must be able to do," she said.

Her comments highlighted the important role of the army in the country, which had been ruled by successive military dictatorships since 1962, when the military took power from a democratically-elected government in a coup, until the previous regime handed over power to the current nominally-civilian government headed mostly by former military generals.

Under Burma's Constitution, the military controls a quarter of the seats in the national Parliament and also wields substantial influence through the National Defense and Security Council, a body that is assumed to make the final decisions regarding the most important aspects of governing the country.

Regarding Burma's unresolved ethnic conflicts, Suu Kyi said that both the country's rulers and the ethnic leaders need to restore confidence in each other.

The pro-democracy leader also called for the release of the country's remaining political prisoners and noted the discrepancy between the number of political prisoners listed by the NLD and the number claimed by the state-backed Human Rights Commission.

On Sunday, the Human Rights Commission sent an open letter to President Thein Sein praising the government for its release last month of about 200 of what they said is the 500 political prisoners in the country, and calling for a further release of prisoners.

Suu Kyi, however, said the list of political prisoners gathered by the NLD is longer than 500 persons, and it will look into the matter.

Ten Years On

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