



BURMA REPORT

March 2012

မြန်မာ - မှတ်တမ်း

Issue N° 106

Will 1st April by-election be free and fair?

AP- February 2, 2012 - <<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/suu-kyi-campaign-sheds-light-on-burmas-political-spirit-20120201-1qtg5.html#ixzz1l95e6S00>>

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, INLDMembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSKl News & Articles on Burma, Wed, 01. Feb 2012

Suu Kyi campaign sheds light on Burma's political spirit



DAWEI, Burma: Euphoric supporters waved opposition party flags and offered yellow garlands. They lined crumbling roads and climbed trees, cars and roofs as Aung San Suu Kyi spoke at impromptu rallies. Some cried as her convoy passed.

Cheered by tens of thousands, the 66-year-old opposition leader electrified Burma's repressive political landscape everywhere she travelled on her first political tour of the countryside since her party registered to run in a historic ballot that could see her elected to parliament.

Visionary ... opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi waves to supporters in the district of Dawei. Photo: AFP

"We will bring democracy to the country," Ms Suu Kyi said to roaring applause as her voice boomed through loudspeakers from the balcony of a National League for Democracy office in the southern coastal district of Dawei. "We will bring rule of law ... and we will see to it that repressive laws are repealed."

Advertisement: Story continues below

As huge crowds screamed "Long Live Daw Aung San Suu Kyi!" and others held banners saying "You Are Our Heart", she said: "We can overcome any obstacle with unity and perseverance, however difficult it may be."

Ms Suu Kyi's campaign - and byelections due on April 1 - are being watched closely worldwide as a crucial test of whether the military-backed government is committed to reform.

The fact that Ms Suu Kyi was able to speak openly in public - and her supporters were able to greet her en masse without fear of reprisal - was proof of dramatic progress. Such scenes would have been unthinkable just a year ago, when the long-ruling junta was still in power and demonstrations were all but banned. Suu Kyi's visit was equivalent to waking a sleeping dragon, said the environmental activist Aung Zaw Hein.

"People had been afraid to discuss politics for so long," he said. "Now that she's visiting, the political spirit of people has been awakened." Looking into the giant crowds, Mr Hein said: "I've never seen people's faces look like this before. For the first time they have hope in their eyes."

A National League for Democracy win on April 1 would be highly symbolic, but Ms Suu Kyi's party would have limited power since the parliament is dominated by the military and the ruling pro-military party. Up for grabs are 48 seats vacated by MPs who were appointed to the cabinet and other posts.

Associated Press

Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com>, "NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahoogroups.com", Burma Related News - Feb 02, 2012

The Atlantic - <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/why-burma-would-turn-against-china/252412/>>

Why Burma Would Turn Against China - By John Lee - Feb 2 2012

Last October, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech to the New York Economic Club. She spoke on the need for the United States to improve its statecraft by using economic policy to enhance its diplomatic leverage abroad. The speech was delivered in the context of widespread concern inside the State Department that Beijing's economic and aid policies have proven more effective than the middle-through approaches of Western democracies.

From a distance, authoritarian great powers appear far more efficient at harnessing economic tools for strategic advantage. But recent developments in Burma suggest that Beijing's statecraft may not be as effective as has been suggested.

Beijing's Influence

Burma remains the most ostracized country in Asia outside North Korea. Since the junta's brutal crackdown of protesters in 1988, the United States and the European Union have imposed increasingly robust economic sanctions against the regime. China also faced international condemnation over the repression of demonstrators following the 1989 Tiananmen protests, and since the 1990s, Beijing has emerged as Rangoon's most dependable ally.

Rangoon seems willing to take shelter under Beijing's embrace: China is behind two-thirds of all foreign investment in Burma and is its second-largest trading partner after Thailand. China is the primary supplier of military equipment to the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces. Beijing provides diplomatic and political cover for the regime, consistently vetoing U.S. plans to investigate allegations of civilian repression through UN agencies. Without Chinese economic and technical assistance, the stuttering Burmese economy would have completely collapsed, endangering the continued rule of the junta. It is no wonder that Burma is sometimes dismissed as a Chinese "economic colony" or even as the unofficial twenty-third province of China.

Turning West

When President Thein Sein took office last March, few expected much change from the emergence of a so-called civilian government. But the last few months in Burma have taken the region and America by surprise.

The president suspended the \$3.6 billion Chinese-funded Myitsone Dam project on the northern mouth of the Irawaddy River. The dam was to send 90 percent of the hydroelectric power generated to Yunnan Province in China for the next fifty years.

In an unexpected move, Rangoon has welcomed several senior American officials over the past few months. These include Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former presidential candidate John McCain, former vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. All have returned expressing cautious optimism about the prospect of political reform in Burma.

Clinton was even granted an audience with Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who is considered by the West to be the legitimate leader of Burma on account of her election victory in 1990. Rangoon has approved meetings between Suu Kyi, Thai prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra and British foreign secretary William Hague. Released from house arrest in 2010, she was recently cleared to run for parliamentary elections in April 2012.

Cautious Reform

China's continued courting of Burma is understandable--and to be expected. Burma is of strategic importance because it is superbly positioned above the Andaman Sea, which leads into the shipping chokepoint of the Malacca Straits. Potential transport routes through Burma also offer southern Chinese provinces an alternative to relying solely on U.S.-patrolled maritime routes through Southeast Asia.

But as in African countries such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, Algeria and Nigeria, China is also interested in the resources of its southern neighbor: oil, gas, minerals, timber and hydropower generation. Almost all Chinese investment in Burma is in these sectors and by state-owned-enterprises (SOE). And as is often the case with Chinese SOE activity in poor countries ruled by authoritarian, corrupt regimes, the implied pact between Beijing and its partner's political elites--with both under less pressure to address the concerns of their citizens than in genuine democracies--offers little in the way of economic, employment or social return to local populations. For example, Beijing puts no pressure on its SOEs to limit the environmental impact of commercial activities--especially mining--in foreign lands. Resentment is only deepening: Locals in the northeast economic regions close to China have long complained that commerce is dominated by Chinese entrepreneurs and businesses.

As in parts of Africa, Burma's leaders are discovering that Chinese authoritarian largesse has a price. China negotiates with weak authoritarian countries from a position of strength. "No-strings-attached" economic aid, investment and political

cover are explicit extensions of Chinese foreign policy, and Beijing expects considerable strategic and economic returns. In contrast, the activities of Western firms and those from countries such as Japan are watched by the government and other concerned groups. Even stringent conditions-based aid, preferred by democratic countries and institutions such as the World Bank, is beginning to appear more attractive.

As Beijing can attest, even authoritarian regimes must eventually respond to demands of their citizens. China will remain Burma's primary economic partner. But Rangoon is reaching out to democratic states--and promising gradual political reform in the future--in order to find alternatives to Burma becoming a de facto Chinese colony.

This pivot does not necessarily mean that genuinely free and fair elections will be held in Burma soon. But it should cast doubt on the self-defeating argument making the rounds in democratic capitals, including Washington, that authoritarian powers like China are far more efficient and successful at statecraft than their democratic rivals.

This article originally appeared at NationalInterest.org, an Atlantic partner site.

[John Lee](#) - Dr. John Lee is the Michael Hintze Fellow for Energy Security, an adjunct associate professor at the Centre for International Security Studies at Sydney University and a nonresident senior scholar at the Hudson Institute in Washington, DC.

<<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/why-burma-would-turn-against-china/252412/>>

THE BURMANET NEWS, February 3 - 6, 2012, Issue #4341, newsletter covering Burma, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

Associated Press - February 6, 2012 -

Myanmar panel says Suu Kyi can run for Parliament

Aye Aye Win - <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2012/02/05/myanmar-panel-says-suu-kyi-can-run-for-parliament?s_cid=related-links:TOP>

Yangon, Myanmar — An elections panel Monday affirmed opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's candidacy for Myanmar's Parliament in another step toward political openness in a country emerging from nearly a half-century of iron-fisted military rule.

A victory in the April 1 by-elections would be historic. Suu Kyi could have a voice in Parliament for the first time after spending most of the last two decades under house arrest.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate announced her intention last month to run in the April elections but was waiting for official approval from the Elections Commission, which said it had to scrutinize her eligibility.

A National League for Democracy spokesman confirmed the commission had approved her candidacy. "There is no objection to her nomination and we can say that her candidacy is officially accepted," Nyan Win said.

Government agencies in Myanmar normally don't announce their actions directly, but the government gazette is expected to disclose the official decision later.

Myanmar's nominally civilian government took office last March and has surprised even some of the country's toughest critics by releasing hundreds of political prisoners, signing cease-fire deals with ethnic rebels, increasing media freedoms and easing censorship laws.

Myanmar's government hopes the rapid changes will prompt the lifting of economic sanctions imposed under the junta's rule. Western governments and the United Nations have said they will review the sanctions only after gauging whether the April polls are carried out freely and fairly.

Suu Kyi's party won a sweeping victory in the 1990 general election but the junta refused to honor the results.

Even if the National League for Democracy party wins all 48 seats being contested, it will have minimal power. The 440-seat lower house of Parliament is heavily weighted with military appointees and allies of the former junta.

Suu Kyi will run for a seat representing Kawhmu, a poor district south of Yangon where villagers' livelihoods were devastated by Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, Wed, 01. Feb 2012

The Jakarta Post - 02/01/2012, <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/02/01/gold-rush-burma-country-opens.html>>

Gold rush to Burma as country opens up - Nirmal Ghosh
(The Straits Times), The Asia News Network, Singapore | Wed, 02/01/2012 3:53 PM

The region's latest gold rush is on, and all the roads, it appears, are leading to Myanmar.

As the government opens up the previously tightly-controlled economy and accelerates reforms, and as some Western-imposed sanctions get lifted, businessmen from the United States, Germany and Japan, among others, have been flocking to the country in search of the next big thing.

For weeks now, business hotels in Rangoon have been running at full occupancy, while real estate prices have shot up and so have rentals, the result of the influx of foreigners. Investors are scouting for opportunities in a country with much untapped potential across the board, from mining and energy to tourism and telecommunications.

"Things are beginning to fall into place in Myanmar," observed Singapore-based Manu Bhaskaran, chief executive of Centennial Asia Advisors. "Obviously there is risk, but clearly there is momentum."

That momentum is evident in the growing number of visits by businessmen from around the world.

This month, an American delegation is due to visit. Last month, billionaire George Soros went, and said he would set up an office to facilitate philanthropic work. In December last year, a group of executives from Germany's biggest bank and its government investment arm visited, as did a Japanese team of corporate from Hitachi, Toshiba, Mitsui, Itochu, JX Nippon Oil & Energy, and Marubeni.

Investors from as far away as Norway, Brazil and Russia have expressed interest in Myanmar's energy sector, while neighbors China, India, Thailand and Vietnam have held trade shows in Rangoon or dropped by to explore infrastructure projects.

The keen interest follows the rapid political and economic reforms that Myanmar's government has been carrying out, at a pace that has surprised even critics. On Monday, in an exclusive interview with The Straits Times, President Thein Sein pledged his commitment to the reforms, saying they will go on until Myanmar achieves a "flourishing democracy".

International Monetary Fund (IMF) executive Meral Karasulu, after a mission to Myanmar early last month, told reporters: "Myanmar has a high growth potential and could become the next economic frontier in Asia, if it can turn its rich natural resources, young labor force, and proximity to some of the most dynamic economies in the world into its advantage."

Indeed, there is vast opportunity in the country of 62 million, ASEAN's biggest after Indonesia. It boasts natural resources such as gas deposits, has a large, young workforce, and offers many opportunities in tourism and infrastructure development.

But, as Bhaskaran pointed out, numerous risks remain in doing business in a country that has just emerged from decades of military dictatorship.

Among the problems, it has a poorly developed financial sector, a very small stock market, an unsettling dual foreign exchange rate, and frequent power shortages. There is no statutory minimum wage, and health care and educational systems have been eroded. Young people in Myanmar today speak less English than those in their 60s.

"There is certainly a gold rush, but at the same time, a lot of money is still off the table," noted professor Sean Turnell, head of the Burma Economic Watch unit at Australia's Macquarie University. "People are visiting and recognizing that there is good potential, but they are still cautious."

One of the key barriers is the massive gap between the official and black market rate for the kyat – 6.5 kyats to US\$1 versus about 800 kyats to US\$1 on the latter – which complicates business.

Another key issue is labor law reform, needed to protect both employers and workers. A new law allowing trade unions to be formed has not yet taken effect because the rules have not been finalized, although they could be ready in weeks. A new law covering labor disputes is also in the works.

The country could also find a shortage of skilled workers, which could see many locals returning from abroad – including Singapore – to take up the new jobs when investments take root. Skeptics also warn of "potential volatility" in the reforms.

But analysts noted that the government is making moves in the right direction, such as making plans to empower its central bank to fix the exchange rate issue, and working to set up market structures for trade.

"At the top level they are genuinely trying and would like to do it as soon as possible," observed Turnell.

Thein Sein, who is now in Singapore on a state visit, this week also signed an agreement for Singapore to train Myanmar officials in a wide range of sectors, from legal, banking and financial to trade and tourism.

Bhaskaran pointed out that such constraints were not unlike those found in China and Vietnam when those countries

began opening up.

"These are problems but they are not insurmountable," he said. "With some economic sanctions being reduced, and economic and political reform, the momentum will soon become unstoppable." (mtq)

Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] Burma Related News - Feb 07, 2012.

The Age - <<http://www.smh.com.au/world/officials-seek-to-thwart-suu-kyi-20120207-1r59m.html>>

Officials seek to thwart Suu Kyi - Hamish McDonald - February 8, 2012

BURMA'S opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, resumed her parliamentary byelection campaign yesterday as nervous officials moved to ensure that many of her younger supporters would be unable to attend her rallies.

Before her mass meeting in Patheingyi, a port city in the Irrawaddy delta, local authorities suddenly announced an unusual "pre-entrance test" exam for local students seeking to enrol in universities - ensuring that large numbers of students would be otherwise engaged while she was in town.

Last weekend, Ms Suu Kyi called off a planned rally in Burma's second biggest city, Mandalay, after authorities refused to let her National League for Democracy party use a large football stadium, instead offering a smaller field.

Her party is running candidates for all the 40 seats vacated in the 440-seat lower house of Parliament by members elevated to ministerial and other executive positions.

The seats are scattered across the country, mostly in the central plains dominated by the ethnic Burman majority, and the result will be a pointer to the next elections due in 2015.



UN human rights envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana stated the byelections would be a 'key test' of the army-backed regime's commitment to reform. Photo: Getty Images

Although the military has 25 per cent of the seats and the constitution can only be amended by a 75 per cent vote, the prospect of a sweep by Ms Suu Kyi and the NLD, and formation of a government, is a nightmare for the military's old guard. The nominally civilian government came to power in Burma last year after controversial November 2010 elections and has since surprised observers with a number of positive moves including a major release of political prisoners.

Yet Ms Suu Kyi's decision to enter this year's byelection race, after previously boycotting the 2010 elections and vowing not to accept the 2008 constitution engineered by the former military regime, is also seen to reflect thinking that the new President, former general Thein Sein, might be building a popular political persona himself.

As well as meeting Ms Suu Kyi and drawing her into the political system, President Thein Sein began releasing political prisoners, suspended a much criticised Chinese dam on the upper Irrawaddy, and signalled intentions to open up Burma's moribund economy.

The political situation in Burma, however, remains tense, with top United Nations human rights envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana stating the byelections would be a "key test" of the army-backed regime's commitment to reform.

Tin Kyi <mtinkyi7@yahoo.com>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] Burma Related News - Feb 03, 2012.

Asia Pacific News - <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/1180774/1/.html>, Posted: 03 February 2012

Suu Kyi postpones major election rally

YANGON: Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has postponed a major political rally in the central city of Mandalay because the venue offered by the authorities is too small, her party said Friday.

Tens of thousands of supporters turned out on Sunday to greet the Nobel Peace Prize winner on a campaign trip to the

south ahead of April 1 by-elections, and an even bigger crowd had been expected this weekend.

But the pro-democracy leader decided to postpone the two-day visit, which had been due to start on Saturday, because the football ground where she wanted to deliver a speech is not available, said a spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

"The Union Election Commission has allowed us to gather at another football ground with a capacity of about 10,000 people, but her audiences can be in the tens of thousands," he said.

"She worries people might be injured because of the size of the crowd. That's why she postponed the trip. She will go there later for sure."

He said Suu Kyi's plan to visit the Irrawaddy region on February 7 was unaffected.

During her trip on Sunday to the southern city of Dawei, streets were flooded with local people waving flags, cheering and dancing with delight at the appearance of the democracy icon, who could be swept into parliament by the April vote.

Traffic clogged the roads as Suu Kyi's convoy, trailed by a large number of cars and motorbikes, travelled around the district.

Suu Kyi's decision to stand for a seat in parliament is the latest sign of dramatic change taking place in the country formerly known as Burma after the end of nearly half a century of outright military rule.

A new government dominated by former generals came to power last year following November 2010 elections that were marred by widespread complaints of cheating and the absence of Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest at the time.

The regime has since surprised observers with reforms including welcoming the NLD back into the political mainstream, signing ceasefire deals with ethnic minority rebels and releasing hundreds of political prisoners.

Western nations are now considering easing sanctions, further raising hopes of an end to decades of isolation, but controversy surrounding the 2010 vote means the upcoming by-elections will be heavily scrutinised.

-AFP/ac

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 13 February 2012, Mon, 13. Feb 2012 05:57:51

Financial Times – 12 February 2012 - <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/1bf86404-5537-11e1-b66d-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1mFuVaFaK>>

Myanmar reformist era enters new phase - By Gwen Robinson in Yangon

Myanmar's reformist era entered a new phase as de facto opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi kicked off her campaign for a parliamentary seat in a poor rural area south of Yangon.

Ms Suu Kyi has visited several parts of the country ahead of the official start of campaigning for an April 1 by-election for 48 parliamentary seats.

In a crucial test, Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party is contesting all 48 seats in the by-election for the 664-seat combined houses of parliament. The seats were vacated by MPs who joined the government after the 2010 polls.

Western governments have made the fair conduct of elections a condition for lifting sanctions against Myanmar, along with the resolution of conflicts with ethnic rebel groups and the release of political prisoners. Diplomats and human rights groups estimate that 300-400 political detainees remain in prison.

One Yangon-based diplomat cautioned on Sunday that "free and fair elections are not just about polling day", and said Western governments would closely monitor the campaign process.

Media attention has overwhelmingly focused on Ms Suu Kyi, but at least 19 other parties are fielding candidates in the April poll.

Despite expectations Ms Suu Kyi will sweep into parliament, "it's important to remember this is not a one-woman democracy", said Khin Maung Swe, a founder and leader of the National Democratic Force, Myanmar's second-largest



Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi waves to supporters as she travels back from a British-funded project in the Magwe division of Pakokku township, northern Myanmar. (AFP/File - Soe Than Win)

opposition party.

However, NDF members will support Ms Suu Kyi and her MPs in parliament "if their policies are good for the country," Mr Khin Maung Swe said. After all, "this is the time for state-building, not power fighting".

With a national member base of about 10,000, the NDF is tiny compared with Ms Suu Kyi's NLD, which had to re-register as a party for the April 1 by-election after boycotting the 2010 general election. NLD organisers estimate they have so far signed up about 500,000 members.

It is a deeply ironic moment for Mr Khin Maung Swe and the NDF. A political detainee for 17 years, he was an ardent NLD supporter but led a breakaway group in a bitter split after Ms Suu Kyi urged the electoral boycott in 2010.

The NDF won a total 16 seats in parliament and regional legislatures in that poll and is the only mainstream opposition party to hold more than a few parliamentary seats. This time, it will contest just 12 of the 48 seats.

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - **09 February** 2012, Thu, 09. Feb 2012 18:39:14
watoday.com.au - <<http://www.watoday.com.au/world/dont-rush-to-burma-firms-told-20120209-1rwp8.html>>

Don't rush to Burma, firms told - Lindsay Murdoch - February 10, 2012



Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: Getty Images

BURMA'S hardliners and reformers are locked in an intensifying power struggle as pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi warns foreign businesses against rushing to invest in the impoverished country.

"I think [business people] should wait and see a little, for their own good as well as the country," Ms Suu Kyi said in Rangoon, where hotels are full, mostly with visiting business delegations.

"I think it's not just a matter of potential investments but also a matter of the potential of the country to cope with the investments," she said.

Referring to Burma's corrupt judicial system, she told heads of large Asian corporations that "it's no good having good investment laws if you don't have a good judicial system to make sure the laws are applied."

Earlier this week US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed a waiver that will make it easier for the World Bank and other multilateral institutions to advise Burma on reforms.

After 50 years of international isolation and disastrous military rule, Burma offers the least legal protection for foreign companies and investors of any country, a report by the risk analysis firm Maplecroft says.

Ms Suu Kyi repeated comments that the reforms implemented since August last year are not "past the point where you can say it's irreversible". "We are going to have to make it irreversible ... that's why we are contesting in the byelections."

Ms Suu Kyi, daughter of Burma's independence hero Aung San, is campaigning for a seat in elections scheduled for April 1. Analysts say her message of political freedom and democracy could snowball into a groundswell of support for more aggressive reforms.

But Burma's Railways Minister, Aung Min, who has played a key role in negotiating peace deals with armed ethnic groups, has confirmed reports of the power struggle in the capital, Naypyidaw, telling Thailand-based exiles that reforms implemented by President Thein Sein had met with stiff opposition from within the government, the Irrawaddy newspaper run by Burmese exiles reported.

Reports have emerged from within the military-dominated government recently that hardliners led by Vice-President Tin Aung Myint Oo want to derail reforms.

Some of the hardliners who were close to ageing military strongman Than Shwe before he retired are said to be upset at the recent release of about 2000 political prisoners.

There has been heated debate about the release in the powerful 11-member National Defence and Security Council, which is co-chaired by Thein Sein, according to informed reports. Hardliners wanted the prisoner releases to occur after the April by-elections for more than 40 parliamentary seats.

They are said to be poised to attack the reformers if social unrest or political demonstrations breaks out, reports say.

But at least 60 per cent of government ministers are sitting on the fence, waiting to see who wins the power struggle, several reliable analysts say.

<http://www.watoday.com.au/world/dont-rush-to-burma-firms-told-20120209-1rwp8.html>

The Irrawaddy – Newsletter, February 13, 2012, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy – EDITORIAL - Monday, February 13, 2012

Burma's Trust Deficit - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=23025>

There are few national anniversaries in Burma more significant than the one it commemorated on Sunday. It was on this day 65 years ago that Burmese independence leader Aung San and his Shan, Chin and Kachin counterparts signed the Panglong Agreement, which served as the basis for the creation of a federal Union of Burma.

But Union Day is not just one of Burma's most important occasions—it is also one of its most bizarre. After all, a military coup that ended parliamentary rule just 15 years later also effectively nullified this historic agreement. Fifty years after taking power, the military continues to impose its own narrow notions of “unity” on the country's many ethnic minorities.

However, the fact that Burma still marks Union Day on Feb. 12 is some cause for hope. It shows that Aung San's vision of a federal union, which he did not live to see, remains the most viable alternative for a country that desperately needs to heal its internal divisions. Half a century of unity at gunpoint, which has left the country weak and vulnerable to exploitation by its far more powerful neighbors, has only served to underline the need to return to sounder principles.

Amid all the talk of “reforms” since last year, countless voices have chimed in about what Burma really needs in order to move forward. Generally, the West has called for free and fair elections and an end to ethnic conflict, while the rest of Asia has stressed the need for economic development through foreign investment.

While these are indeed essential to creating a peaceful and prosperous country, they will have little positive impact if one other key ingredient is missing: trust.

Trust will be the single most important factor in determining whether Burma is ready, at long last, to realize its true potential as a nation. Without it, even the progress that we have seen since last year would have been unthinkable. If opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi hadn't decided that she could trust President Thein Sein, Burma would still be stuck in the stalemate of the past two decades.

But Burma still suffers from an enormous trust deficit. Beginning with its negation of the Panglong Agreement, and culminating with its refusal to recognize the results of Burma's 1990 elections, the military has a long record of broken promises. Just last week, it resumed attacks on Shan rebels two months after reaching a ceasefire deal, indicating that it still sees little need to honor agreements.

On the political front, things are, at least so far, somewhat better. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) has been able to prepare for upcoming by-elections without facing the sort of harassment it has had to deal with in the past. Moreover, a visiting UN envoy has said that Burma might allow election monitors to observe the polls—a sign that at least some in power recognize the need to win the trust of others, rather than simply demanding it.

While many still feel that the government is merely taking a calculated risk in allowing the NLD to make a comeback, in the expectation that this will lead to a lifting of sanctions, it would be making a serious mistake if it believed that this alone will be enough to save Burma's economy. Although potential investors are now lining up for a chance to see what the country has on offer, few will stick around when they realize that it lacks any meaningful system of legal protections, as

British risk assessment research company Maplecroft highlighted last week.

While Suu Kyi has often correctly stated that Burma needs to restore rule of law if it wants to develop as a nation, she has also noted that this is more than a matter of introducing new laws. Even the most enlightened laws have little value if no one has any confidence that they will be properly enforced and fairly applied.

If Burma's rulers truly want to end the country's disastrous isolation, they will have to begin by proving that they can be taken at their word. This will mean going beyond the current charm offensive and taking measures to rein in elements of the military that still regard themselves as laws unto themselves.

It will also require an acknowledgment of how far the country has strayed from its founding principles, and a firm commitment to keeping promises made to its ethnic peoples. Without this, Burma will be hard-pressed to emerge from the past half-century of unmitigated misery.

THE BURMANET NEWS - email newsletter, BurmaNet News, February 15 - 16, 2012, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Irrawaddy - INSIDE BURMA - February 16, 2012 - By THE IRRAWADDY <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=23048>

People, army should work together: Suu Kyi



Aung San Suu Kyi greets supporters in Hlegu Township on Feb. 15, 2012. (Photo: The Irrawaddy)

Burma's army needs to be closer to the general public, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi told supporters in Hlegu Township, Rangoon Division, on Wednesday, as she continued campaigning ahead of April 1 by-elections.

Speaking to an audience that included members of the armed forces and their families, Suu Kyi said that her National League for Democracy (NLD) wants the military and the people of Burma to join hands to bring about democracy in the country.

"I hope our supporters in Hlegu Township include many families from the army. Let's join hands together, the army and the people, for democracy," Suu Kyi told the assembled crowd.

Urging Burma to move beyond the winner-take-all politics of the past, Suu Kyi said that democracy allows people to have different opinions, but requires all parties to settle their differences by peaceful and nonviolent means.

She added that during elections, political parties should not treat each other as enemies but as opponents. The election-winning party should be considerate and generous to other parties, and the latter should also be able to accept the election result and congratulate the former, she continued.

"We have to bear in mind that our opponents are helping to make democracy flourish. Democracy only works when there is an opposition. Without opposition, there cannot be true democracy," Suu Kyi stressed.

She said that by contesting all 48 vacant constituencies in the coming by-elections, the NLD will officially become a

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

democratic opposition party

“Although this is a small number of seats in Parliament, we are competing for them in the spirit of democracy. We can only build up our capacity to actually lead the country by having the courage to act as the opposition. Political forces that dare not oppose or stand as minority opposition parties will not be able lead the country with genuine leadership skills,” she said.

She added that the NLD's focus in the current campaign is to promote the rule of law, achieve internal peace and amend the Constitution.

“From 1990 to 2012, we had to struggle a lot. But we feel it was worthwhile, because now we can be in touch with our people again. A window of opportunity has opened so that we can build the country we desire by combining our strength and that of the people. However, this path has just opened and we need the people's support and votes to continue our journey,” she said.

Phyo Min Thein, a former political prisoner who took part in Burma's 1988 pro-democracy uprising, will stand as the NLD's candidate in Hlegu Township.

Suu Kyi's latest trip on the campaign trail did not go entirely smoothly.

On Tuesday, the day before Suu Kyi was to arrive in Hlegu, local authorities revoked permission to use a football pitch for a planned campaign rally. However, the problem was resolved after the party complained about the decision to the Union Election Commission (UEC).

“The UEC rightly decided that we could continue as planned because we had already been granted permission. That's why we can gather today. That is the rule of law,” said Suu Kyi.

The Irrawaddy, Newsletter for Tuesday, February 21, 2012, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org, Tue, 21. Feb 2012

The Irrawaddy – COMMENTARY - Tuesday, February 21, 2012 <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=23074&page=1>

Turning Burma into Next Asian Tiger No Simple Task

By KYAW ZWA MOE

Burma, which until very recently was seen as Southeast Asia's “problem child, is fast emerging as a rising star in the region. After decades of military misrule, many now feel that this battered country is ready to emerge as Asia's next tiger economy.



Among the biggest Burma boosters these days is Surin Pitsuwan, the secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), who is currently visiting the country.

In a recent Bangkok Post commentary, he wrote that Burma “has not only opened herself to the world, she is now ready to compete constructively with the rest of the Asean member states and, by extension, with the rest of the world.”

Burma's ongoing “opening” to the outside world would, he added, “continue to present a set of formidable challenges to Asean.”

Surin's comments were, in part, a response to remarks made by Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who told a visiting Asean Business Club delegation earlier this month that her “simple ambition” was “to see Burma ahead of all the Asean countries [in the next 10 years].”

But before Burma can match Suu Kyi's words with action, it will have a lot of catching up to do. And before that can even begin, it will have to resolve a host of issues that have plagued it for decades.

In fact, Burma is just beginning to take its first steps out of the political and economic quagmire in which it has found itself for the past half-century. It must now deal with everything from ethnic conflicts to rampant cronyism and a fiendishly complicated foreign exchange system.

So far, Thein Sein's nominally civilian government has had some success in convincing the Burmese people and the international community that he is at least on the right track. He has done this by reaching out to Suu Kyi, releasing prominent political prisoners, negotiating ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed groups and making tentative moves to open up the economy.

But even after a year of the most significant changes since 1962, there are many elements within the current government that have barely begun to budge. Most of the ex-generals in the former junta are still in charge, and no one from any of the opposition or pro-democracy groups holds a position in the government. The speakers of both houses of Parliament

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

are powerful ex-generals.

Less than a year ago, these facts were seen as evidence that nothing at all had changed in the wake of the November 2010 election that was supposed to usher in a new era of "disciplined democracy." Now, however, people seem willing to let this pass, perhaps believing that Suu Kyi will somehow be able to correct this situation after she wins a seat in Parliament in the April 1 by-elections.

That is wishful thinking. We know that there are "hardliners" lurking in the shadows, quietly staying out of the limelight but ready to pounce the moment they see any threat to their interests. Already, we have seen some efforts to trip up Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which is now on the campaign trail for the first time in more than two decades.

At a press conference on Monday, NLD spokesperson Nyan Win said that some authorities had obstructed the party's campaign activities by withdrawing permission to use sports stadiums and soccer fields for political rallies. However, within hours of making the complaint, the Union Election Commission informed the NLD that all such restrictions on its activities had been lifted.

This speedy response to the NLD's grievances came as a real surprise, but the reason for the problem was far less surprising. It turns out that the son of Sports Minister Tint Hsan is a candidate in the elections for the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which also demonstrated in 2010 that it had no real faith in its ability to win on an even playing field.

According to reliable high-ranking officials, no more than 30 percent of those currently serving in the government are genuinely interested in reform. The rest, they said, are either sitting on the fence or actively resisting change.

Perhaps that is why Suu Kyi has taken pains to emphasize the military's importance in putting the country on the road to recovery.

Speaking to her supporters in Hlegu, a town that has a large military presence, she said that the army and the people must work together to address the many challenges Burma faces.

Even if Burma does achieve that ever-elusive goal of national reconciliation, many daunting tasks lie ahead before the country can finally begin to realize its full potential.

Recently, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz highlighted one when he visited Burma and reported that the government had come closer to deciding how to simplify its perversely complex exchange rate regime, which has been a drag on the economy for decades.

But this is just one of the more pressing issues that must be addressed. Among the many others are a lack of infrastructure, a primitive banking system, the desperate need for land reforms and a dire shortage of people qualified to seriously tackle any of these problems.

On the plus side, the US has decided to relax its sanctions on Burma to allow the World Bank to provide some much-needed expertise. But even if Washington is sufficiently impressed with Burma's handling of the election to take further measures to end its isolation, it could take years to fully remove all of the sanctions now in place.

In the meantime, we can all applaud Suu Kyi's "simple ambition" for what it is: a vision of what is possible for Burma, if only it can get its act together and start making the right choices for its own future.

Ten Years On

The Life and Views of a Burmese Student Political Prisoner

by **Moe Aye**

(Former Burmese Student Political Prisoner)

(170 pages) in German Euro 10.- + Postage

Burma Büro e.V., P.O. Box N° 27 03 66, D-50509 Köln, Germany.

Tel: 0221-9522450 Fax:0221-9522470

e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de>

Published by : Burma Buero e.V.,P.O.Box 27 03 66, DE-50509 Cologne Tel: + 49 (0) 221-9522450 Fax:+ 49(0) 221-9522470

e-Mail: <burmabureaugermany@t-online.de> -

<http://www.burmabureaugermany.com>

<http://www.burma-report.de>

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA