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Is 1st April by-election free and fair?

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 1 April 2012, Mon, 02. Apr 2012 06:56:16,

Reuters – 1 April 2012 - "Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 1 April 2012, Mon, 02. Apr 2012

Myanmar: Suu Kyi party claims victory on 43 out of 44 seats

The party of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi won Myanmar's weekend by-elections by a landslide, claiming all but one of the vacant seats and clearing the way for the former political prisoner to enter parliament in a historic vote that could lead the West to end sanctions. The charismatic Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who led the struggle against military rule in the former Burma for two decades, seems set to be one of 44 new National League for Democracy (NLD) lawmakers, the party said on Monday.

The NLD did not contest one of the 45 by-elections.

"As far as we have heard from our sources, NLD candidates won in all 44 seats. I think the Election Commission will come up with official announcements soon," NLD campaign manager Nyan Win told Reuters.

If confirmed, the clean sweep would mean the NLD even won four seats in the capital, Naypyitaw, a new city built by the former junta where most of the residents are government employees and military personnel.

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which will remain the biggest in parliament even if the NLD by-election victories are confirmed, could not be reached for comment.

She issued a statement after the poll on Sunday asking supporters to respect the other parties.

"It is natural that the NLD members and their supporters are joyous at this point," Suu Kyi said. "However, it is necessary to avoid manners and actions that will make the other parties and members upset. It is very important that NLD members take special care that the success of the people is a dignified one."

CNN - March 14, 2012 - <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/14/world/asia/myanmar-elections/index.html?hpt=wo_c2>,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR3vv0DK_jw - Share this on: Facebook Twitter Digg delicious reddit MySpace StumbleUpon LinkedIn Viadeo

Myanmar TV broadcasts Suu Kyi speech for 1st time

From Kocha Olarn, CNN - March 14, 2012 -- Updated 1544 GMT (2344 HKT)



Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi speaks at National League for Democracy party headquarters in Yangon in November 2011

Bangkok, Thailand (CNN) -- Myanmar state television broadcast for the first time an election campaign speech by the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, will participate in by-elections on April 1 after boycotting previous elections. She has been crisscrossing the country to attend election rallies.

The international community has applauded recent political reforms in Myanmar, also known as Burma, long secluded from the rest of the world after a military junta grabbed power in 1962. The generals have begun loosening their grip after international sanctions and criticism over their regime's human rights record.

The authorities released Suu Kyi from house arrest in November 2010. She registered last month to run for a parliamentary

seat in Kawhmu after the regime agreed to negotiate with an ethnic rebel group and pardoned hundreds of political prisoners.

Her televised speech Wednesday (14.03.2012) is a result of Myanmar's electoral law, which requires that each political party receive appropriate time to broadcast its manifesto.

The National League for Democracy submitted candidates for all 48 seats up for grabs in the April by-elections.

ThaungN@aol.com, Myanmar invites US election monitors, Wed, 21. Mar 2012 14:12:29

AP NewsBreak: Myanmar invites US election monitors

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20120321/as-myanmar-election-observers/>>

AYE AYE WIN | March 21, 2012 04:43 AM EST | Associated Press - **AP**
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YANGON, Myanmar — Myanmar has invited the U.S. and European Union to send observers to monitor April elections, an American official said Wednesday, a first for the long-isolated country seeking to convince the West to lift crippling sanctions.

Myanmar's government has not yet announced that it will allow international monitors into the country, but word has leaked out from around the world.

The 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations said in a statement Tuesday that Myanmar had invited its neighboring countries to send a five-member delegation along with two parliamentarians and media representatives from each country.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Embassy in Yangon said the invitation had also been extended to Washington and the European Union, which are dialogue partners of ASEAN.

"We are encouraged that the authorities have invited international representatives as observers, including from ASEAN, the EU and the United States," embassy spokeswoman Adrienne Nutzman told The Associated Press. She said an invitation was sent to Washington.

"It's notable that the Burmese government will also allow some journalists from these countries to observe the process, demonstrating increased openness to the foreign media," Nutzman said.

She declined to give details of how many American monitors would be allowed and if the U.S. had accepted the invitation, deferring further comment to Washington.

It was not immediately clear what sort of access would be granted to the observers.

The British Embassy received a note from Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying it could send a representative from the mission to participate in an "observation tour" on election day, said embassy official Joe Fisher.

After half a century of military rule, Myanmar's army ceded power last year to a nominally civilian government. Since then, President Thein Sein has surprised Western governments by making several dramatic changes, including opening up next month's by-elections to the opposition party of Aung San Suu Kyi, releasing hundreds of political prisoners, signing truces with rebel groups and easing restrictions on the media.

But the international community says more progress is needed, including releasing all remaining political prisoners and putting an end to ethnic violence and human rights abuses, which rights groups say continue despite the unprecedented reform campaign.

The U.S., EU and others say the polls will be "a key test" of the government's commitment to reforms.

American officials have called for a free and fair election in April and say the conduct of the by-elections will be a major factor in the West's decision to lift economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar during the military junta's rule.

The April by-election is being held to fill 48 parliamentary seats vacated over the past year.

Suu Kyi, a former political prisoner and 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is running for one of the seats in parliament and has generated enormous support for her party in a nationwide campaign tour. If Suu Kyi wins her seat, it would give her a voice in government for the first time after decades as the country's iconic opposition leader.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party overwhelmingly won a 1990 general election but the military refused to

let it take power.

The opposition party boycotted a 2010 general election, saying the rules were unfair. It agreed to rejoin electoral politics last year when Thein Sein's government began implementing democratic reforms.

Myanmar's former ruling junta had rejected international bids to observe the last two elections, in 2010 and 1990.

Associated Press writer Jocelyn Gecker in Bangkok contributed to this report.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Tuesday, March 6, 2012 13:08:32 news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Thousands Turn Out for Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw

By ZARNI MANN / THE IRRAWADDY Tuesday, March 6, 2012 - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=23155



Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi greets supporters in Dakhina Thiri Township in Naypyidaw on Monday. (PHOTO: Irrawaddy)

Thousands of local people defied expectations and turned out to listen to pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi as her election campaign hit the government stronghold of Naypyidaw.

"Thousands of people were waiting and cheering at every venue," said Suu Kyi's personal secretary Khun Thar Myint. "The numbers were much higher than we expected. We are grateful that we could successfully deliver our message."

Suu Kyi expressed her gratitude to the crowds in the Burmese capital, saying she was concerned that people might be afraid to attend an event organized by the National League for Democracy (NLD).

"I didn't expect so many supporters in a city full of civil servants," she said at one rally. "I thought that most people would not come out, but I'm glad to see you are here."

Much of the crowd included rural people from nearby villages. They stood shoulder to shoulder with government employees at each venue and cheered in unison as the Nobel Peace Prize laureate took the stage.

"May you [Suu Kyi] be in good health!" shouted one civil servant. When Suu Kyi urged the crowd to vote for her party, a mass cheer rang out.

She called on government employees to join the fight against corruption.

"Civil servants are our citizens," she said. "Their lives lack a security income. The resulting corruption destroys their character. We need to understand their situation and raise their lifestyles, as well as those of farmers, laborers and other people."

Suu Kyi spoke at rallies in Dakinathiri, Zabuthiri, Pubbathiri and Uttarathiri townships where fellow party members Naing Ngan Lin, Sandar Min, Min Thu and hip-hop singer Zeyar Thaw respectively will contest by-election seats.

FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA

Concluding her campaign in Naypyidaw on Tuesday morning, Suu Kyi continued to Taungoo where she is due to speak on her way back to Rangoon.

The NLD has registered to contest all 48 vacant parliamentary seats in the April 1 by-election.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Tuesday, March 6, 2012 13:08:32 news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Suu Kyi Lashes Out in Taungoo - By THE IRRAWADDY - 06. Mar 2012

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=23159>



The NLD's Aung San Suu Kyi addresses supporters in Naypyidaw. (PHOTO: The Irrawaddy)

In a rare show of ire and frustration, Burma's pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi indirectly warned the ruling authorities that the country stood to lose if election campaigning was not carried out in a free and fair manner.

Speaking to hundreds of supporters in Taungoo on Tuesday afternoon, Suu Kyi complained bitterly that her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), was being unfairly restricted.

In what some observers regarded as a thinly veiled threat to the ruling authorities, Suu Kyi warned that the international community was not only watching to ensure that the April 1 by-election was conducted in a free and fair manner, but that it will judge whether all political parties were provided with the freedom to campaign.

In a 15-minute speech, the Nobel Peace Prize winner said, "Any political party that tries to win parliamentary seats by dishonest means will harm the entire country."

She said that international interest in delivering humanitarian aid to Burma began only last year, and that any political restrictions on the democratic process would inevitably lead to a withholding of the necessary support.

"The international community wants to help us because they believe Burma is on a democratic path," she said. "They believe that the country will be pluralist and that everyone can participate in the political process.

"I would like to say very openly that if some [parties] are allowed to compete in the election while others are not, then no one will support us," she said.

Though she did not point the finger at any party or group in particular, Suu Kyi went on to complain that NLD billboards and signs were defaced and destroyed in Naypyidaw, and that once they had been repaired, they were destroyed once again.

She said anyone who would do such a thing had "the worst of attitudes."

Sources in the Burmese capital confirmed that civil servants in the Burmese capital were told not to welcome the NLD leader or to attend her rallies. They said police officers were instructed to turn their backs on Suu Kyi as her convoy passed.

In addition, Suu Kyi was forced to hold her four Naypyidaw rallies in open unshaded areas after failing to get permission to hold the events at football stadiums.

THE BURMANET NEWS, email newsletter covering Burma, March 7, 2012 Issue #4357, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

New York Times - March 7, 2012 - <<http://www.burmanet.org/news/2011/01/31/new-york-times-myanmar-opens-parliament-for-first-time-since-the-%E2%80%99980s-%E2%80%93-thomas-fuller/>>

In election, a new risk for Aung San Suu Kyi – Thomas Fuller



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, campaigned for Parliament last week in Aungban, Myanmar. [More Photos »](#)

Wah Thi Ka, Myanmar — Wah Thi Ka is a dust-choked village without electricity or running water, where no one has a laptop, where no one uses Facebook or e-mail, and where sick residents sometimes die on their way to the nearest hospital because it is too far down a deeply rutted dirt road.

It is also ground zero for a new and risky chapter in the life of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar's democracy movement who is transforming herself from dissident to stump politician campaigning for a seat in Parliament.

A global champion of democracy who spent the better part of two decades under house arrest, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is establishing residency here for elections on April 1. Villagers in this once obscure backwater sound as if they have won the lottery.

"I cannot describe how happy I was when I heard the news," said U Kyaw Win Sein, a rice farmer in Wah Thi Ka who is helping organize her campaign. "Some people said if we can only have the chance to see Mother Suu in person we will be satisfied — we can die in peace."

It is difficult to overstate Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's personal popularity in Myanmar. During recent campaign trips across the country for her party, the National League for Democracy, she received a rock-star greeting. A gathering of her supporters in Mandalay during the first weekend in March resembled a political Woodstock, with tens of thousands of people clogging the streets for hours to greet her motorcade and cramming themselves into a field where she spoke.

Yet by inserting herself into the cut and thrust of Burmese politics, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is placing some of her hard-fought prestige on the line.

Increasingly she is being asked to propose solutions to her country's woes rather than merely lamenting them. Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is a consummate intellectual who spent the first decades of her life hopping across the globe, from Kyoto and New York to Oxford and New Delhi. Being elected to Parliament — assuming she wins — will be a nuts-and-bolts test of whether she can help bring prosperity to a constituency that gets its water by pulling buckets out of a well.

"There's an element of gamble and risk for her," said U Thant Myint-U, a historian and the author of several books on Myanmar, or Burma, as the country is also known.

"Once she's won, and pretty much everybody assumes she'll win, things will be very different," said Mr. Thant Myint-U. "She will have to deal with a range of issues, from the government's fiscal policies to health care reform to responding to demands from her constituency for electricity, cheaper phones and more jobs."

Until now Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's life has often been defined both by her steely defiance toward the military junta and personal tragedies, starting with the assassination of her father, General Aung San, the founder of the Burmese Army, in 1947 when she was just 2 years old.

Biographers and filmmakers have tended to emphasize the wrenching decisions in her adult life: leaving behind her comfortable existence in England to pursue her long and stubborn political struggle for democracy here. Her two children remained in England, and her English husband died there of cancer as she rallied resistance to military rule, which ended last year when a new nominally civilian government came to power.

The transition from government critic to potential policy maker has been a tricky turning point for dissidents in other countries.

Her career could now follow the trajectory of the late Vaclav Havel, who after his rise as an intellectual and activist against Communist rule was twice elected president of the Czech Republic. Or she could slump like Lech Walesa, the hard-charging hero of the Solidarity labor movement in the waning days of Polish Communism, who alienated allies and voters, flirting with single-digit percentages in opinion polls during his one-term presidency.

One factor for Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is her health. At 66 years old, a relentless election campaign is taking its toll. She fell ill during the trip to Mandalay, cut short a speech and was put on a drip by her doctors.

Biographers say she seems to have inherited the dogged personality of her father, who before his assassination in 1947 was in line to become the first leader of Burma after independence from Britain. Those who have met with Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi since her release from house arrest in late 2010 say she appears driven to play an important and substantive role in the country's political future.

"I don't think she wants to be perceived only as an icon," said Larry Dinger, the head of the U.S. mission here until last August who met with her several times during his tenure. "She's a democrat who sees herself as a practical politician."

During the campaign she has spoken in general terms about democracy and the need for more jobs, better health care and education. She emphasizes the importance of achieving unity among the country's many ethnic minorities. But on most issues Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi rarely delves into specifics. She jokes in speeches that she does not like to make promises.

Wah Thi Ka, Myanmar — Wah Thi Ka is a dust-choked village without electricity or running water, where no one has a laptop, where no one uses Facebook or e-mail, and where sick residents sometimes die on their way to the nearest hospital because it is too far down a deeply rutted dirt road.

Those who have met with her privately often come away impressed with her command of issues.

"You don't need to dim the headlights in talking to her, which is something I can't say about politicians in my own country," said Sean Turnell, an Australian academic who is one of the leading analysts on Myanmar's economy and who met with Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi in January for two hours.

He described her as "fluent in the language of economics" and well versed in technical knowledge of issues such as microfinance and property rights. Mr. Turnell said she had read several of his papers, including a recent one titled, "Some Fundamentals of Burma's Macroeconomy."

Myanmar's economic prospects today are uncertain.

For a country sandwiched between the rising economies of China and India, poverty is jarringly endemic, especially in rural areas. A trip through the Myanmar countryside can feel like a time-machine voyage to a pre-industrial society. Oxen drive plows, and houses are made of thatch and bamboo. The constituency where Wah Thi Ka sits and Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is running, Kawhmu, is a two-hour drive south of Yangon, the country's main city, and is not as primitive as other parts of the country. But in most areas it remains without a sewage system, paved roads or cellphone reception. Residents power light bulbs with car batteries, even though there are few cars in sight.

Years of mismanagement by a corrupt and inept military leadership have left Myanmar without a functioning banking and finance system.

By entering politics at this delicate stage, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is imparting legitimacy on a government run by the same generals, now retired, whom she battled against for two decades.

If the reform process currently under way in Myanmar falters, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi may be held partly responsible, analysts say.

Even if her party does well in the April 1 elections, her power in Parliament — numerically at least — will be slight.

The 48 constituencies in contention are just a fraction of the more than 600 seats in Parliament. (The election was called to replace members of Parliament who resigned to take other government posts; the next general election is in 2015.) “At most she’ll end up with a few dozen seats,” said Mr. Thant Myint-U.

Her party’s main challenger is the Union Solidarity and Development Party, a proxy party for the former military junta. But there are also signs of fracture and disaffection within her wider democracy movement.

“I respect her, I like her. But she isn’t the leader of all other democratic forces,” said U Kaung Myint Htut, a candidate running against Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s party in a constituency in Yangon.

“Sometimes we think she is a little self-centered,” Mr. Kaung Myint Htut said. A former political prisoner, he accuses Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi of acting like a queen who does not consult other democracy activists.

Such comments are islands of criticism in a sea of popular admiration, but Bertil Lintner, one of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s biographers, predicts that future fissures will emerge as her party enters the political system.

“As long as they were suppressed and almost banned, they remained united,” he said. “Once the pressure comes off, all sorts of conflicts and contradictions will come to the surface.”

Whatever bickering exists, it does not seem to be diminishing Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s standing among voters, who see her as a repository of hope in a country that until recently had little.

Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi’s opponent is a medical doctor, U Soe Min, who has done little campaigning so far.

U Khin Tint, a local government official in her constituency, appeared confident he already knew the outcome.

“I am the head of the village, so it’s hard for me to say this directly,” he said. “But I don’t see any competition.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/world/asia/in-election-a-new-risk-for-aung-san-suu-kyi.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1>

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/>

‘Elections Neither Free Nor Fair,’ Says Suu Kyi

By THE IRRAWADDY| March 30, 2012 - <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/?slide=elections-neither-free-nor-fair-says-suu-kyi>>



Aung San Suu Kyi cited repeated incidences of intimidation on the campaign trail. (Photo: Irrawaddy)

RANGOON—Pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi said that Sunday’s by-elections will be neither free nor fair because of widespread irregularities, but vowed to continue her candidacy to press forward with reform.

The Nobel laureate said opposition candidates had suffered stone-throwing incidents and other intimidation that hampered their campaigning in the run-up to the weekend poll.

The ballot is considered a crucial test of Burma's commitment to democratic reforms and may well herald the end to punitive economic sanctions imposed by Western nations.

The 66-year-old told a press conference that the irregularities go "beyond what is acceptable for democratic elections."

"I don't think we can consider it genuinely free and fair if we consider what has been going on for the last couple months," she said. "We've had to face many irregularities."

When asked how far she would go to dispute the result, Suu Kyi said she would wait and see.

"We will have to see how the polling goes .. if the will of the people is represented," she said. "We will have to see if these irregularities affect the result."

Suu Kyi said there were attempts to injure candidates and cited two cases in which stones or other objects were thrown at members of her opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), even causing one of the party's security guards to be hospitalized.

There were "many, many cases of intimidation" and vandalism of party campaign posters. She blamed some of the acts on "people in official positions."

Despite the irregularities, Suu Kyi said that the party is "determined to go forward because we think that is what our people want."

The by-elections are likely to mark a symbolic turning point by bringing Suu Kyi into Parliament for the first time, an event that would raise hopes for a more representative government after half-a-century of repressive military rule.

The by-elections will fill 45 vacant seats in Burma's 664-seat Union Parliament.

A victory by Suu Kyi and her opposition NLD would do little to alter the balance of power in Parliament but would give her a voice in government for the first time.

Asked how she wanted to aid the nation, she replied, "in a way to help all the ethnic nationalities to live peacefully and happily with one another.

"I don't need an official position but if it makes my work more effective then why not. We have very unreasonable expectations!—we want to win as many constituencies as possible."

And Suu Kyi vowed to make reconciliation in Burma a priority should she win a parliamentary seat.

"We have differences of opinion within the government ... but we have faced many challenges over the years and we will face many more. I feel we can have a voice within Parliament even if we win about 44 seats."

And Suu Kyi said she was overwhelmed with the strength of support she encountered on the campaign trail.

"Lots of people approached me during the campaign but particularly children jumping up and down and shouting for the NLD," she said.

"I'm not going to visit all the polling stations [in Kawhmu Township where she is standing] but I would like to visit some of them—I do not want to [have] a disruptive effect.

And Suu Kyi said that there were few countries which have had such a chequered history as Burma with respect of prolonged conflict and related abuses.

"We are confident that we too can achieve reconciliation despite our record of violence and violation of human rights," she said.

When asked if she believed that Burma could learn from the South African model of reform, she was positive.

"Certainly we would like to learn from as many countries as possible," she said. "We would like to study all different patterns of reconciliation and see what we can gain from experiences elsewhere.

"We haven't even really started our process of reconciliation officially. We are very interested in how other countries went about it and negotiated settlements."

When asked whether she would want the perpetrators of human rights abuses to face trial, Suu Kyi quoted Arch-Bishop Desmond Tu-Tu, a fellow Nobel Peace Prize winner, in that, "what we believe in is not retributive justice but restorative justice."

Suu Kyi denied that she has had discussions with the government of China regarding democracy, but said that the by-elections were positive for the entire region.

"It's a step towards step one towards democracy," she said. "For the Asean community it's an opportunity to assess if real reforms have taken place or might be taking place in the near future.

"Democracy in this country will be a victory for our people. Once we get into Parliament we will be able to start building towards democratization."

Between – News about Burma - burmaonlinecentre <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, Fri, 30. Mar 2012 01:22:26

April by-elections guarantee a parliament seat for Suu Kyi

Parliament - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/03/30/april-by-elections-guarantee-a-parliament-seat-for-suu-kyi/>>



Parliament -

Democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi is ready and prepared for a return to success via this April 1 by-election where a lot of people predicted that she'll be having an important position in the parliament.

Her victory in this election will instigate a noteworthy and significant change in the democracy of the country believing that her winning will lift various sanctions by international communities.

Various political parties such as the Development Party, the ruling Union Solidarity and other opposition parties including the National League for Democracy (NLD) party will compete for only 45 slots in the parliament, according to news report from Associated Press.

The most remarkable thing about this election is the participation of Myanmar's independence hero General Aung San's daughter Aung San Suu Kyi. Many considered that even if she wins a seat in the parliament it isn't sufficient to intimidate the ruling party but with her winning, everyone is hoping she could persuade the process of legislation which will happen for the very first time.

According to Renaud Egreteau, an expert at the University of Hongkong said she portrayed an outstanding political figure in these recent months. She has been doing all campaign sorties and various political rallies demanding time and effort on her part even at the expense of her health conditions.

But early last week she postponed her schedule because of exhaustion and tiredness going around the country campaigning. Supporters and followers are patiently waiting every time she goes out for her campaign and see her as the answer to all suppressions done in the country.

Many are depending on the turnout of votes for Ms. Suu Kyi and high expectations to help ease the sanctions of Western Union who are still focused on the remaining political prisoners and the reported of human abuses in clashing ethnic areas.

Thailand bureau chief of the Democratic Voice of Burma Toe Zaw Latt said that the government badly needed Suu Kyi in the parliament to polish the governments' records in the reforms being undertaken since many expressed doubts on the genuineness and sincerity of the government.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Monday, March 12, 2012, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Six Burmese Ministries Accused of Corruption

By SAW YAN NAING / THE IRRAWADDY Monday, March 12, 2012 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=23196>

A government audit report released to members of Burma's Lower House of Parliament last week provides evidence of rampant corruption in six key ministries under the former junta, all of which were led by prominent members of the current administration.

According to the findings of an investigation carried out by the office of the auditor general, the six ministries were accused of misusing billions of kyat in government funds and engaging in a variety of illegal transactions.

The ministries singled out by the report were the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Co-operatives, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, the Ministry of Mining and the Ministries of Industry No (1) and No (2).



Members of Burma's Parliament attend a meeting before a speech by President Thein Sein. (Photo: Reuters)

The Ministry of Information is led by Kyaw Hsan, who held the same post under the military regime that ruled Burma until last year. He is regarded as a hardliner opposed to reforms initiated by President Thein Sein.

Former Minister of Industry No (1) Aung Thaung is currently acting as the government's chief negotiator in talks with ethnic armed groups, and former Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation Htay Oo now serves as the head of the ruling military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Former Ministry of Industry No (2) Soe Thein, former Minister of Mining Ohn Myint and former Minister of Co-operatives Tin Htut also have active roles under the current administration.

Khine Maung Yi, a Lower House MP from the opposition National Democratic Force, told The Irrawaddy that he welcomed the report, but urged the respective ministries to carry out thorough investigations and take action against those responsible for wrongdoing.

BurmaNewsGroup - Between news <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, Mon, 19. Mar 2012 00:00:07

Myanmar convince foreign investors by revising the investment law -

<<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/03/19/myanmar-convince-foreign-investors-by-revising-the-investment-law/>>



March 19, 2012 | Filed under: Business,News | Posted by: Between Online News

With the creation of an investment law, it's not necessary for foreign nationals to come up with a business counterpart and they will be given a five year tax holiday from the beginning of their business scheme Reuters reported said, citing from Myanmar report.

It's been long overdue this new investment policy together with the move to float Myanmar's Kyat from April is highly a remarkable economic change the government has done from past years of dictatorship form of government where the country's economy suffered from various elements of negligence and other international sanctions.

The present government has been establishing friendly business relationships in the capital city of Yangon among

countries who contributed international restrictions particularly U.S. and Western Union.

The new law comprises of other significant economic reforms. Foreign investors can now have the alternative to own 100 per cent business establishments or either way choose to put up a joint business undertaking with Burmese people or the option of doing it with the governments with at least 35 per cent of foreign capital.

In addition, the law states that foreign business investors can also rent from the state or from any private citizens who are authorized to make use of the land. It would count for a 30 years length of stay, but will solely based on the kind and size of foreign business being put up to. An extension of 15 years is allowed making it two times in a separate instance, news according from Reuters.

Regarding the labour force, foreign establishments are not allowed to get workers which lacks knowledge, skills and expertise but would hire workers from Myanmar up to 25 per cent who are skilled and considered experts after five years with establishments making the necessary and required training appropriate and suitable for the work force.

Between news <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, Myanmar currency to set at 820 kyats per US dollar. NLdmembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLdnDASSK@yahoo.com, Wed, 21. Mar 2012

Myanmar currency to set at 820 kyats per US dollar

March 21, 2012 - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/03/21/myanmar-currency-to-set-at-820-kyats-per-us-dollar/>>



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As Myanmar move towards its economic reforms, the central bank has offset plans regarding its new exchange rate at 820 kyat per U.S. dollar which is nearly at close with black market exchange.

With these new plans it will certainly surprised those state-owned business companies as well as the government institutions since they have been used to the official rate of 6.4 per U.S. dollar, as revealed by central bank authorities to Reuters.

Aung Kyaw Myo, an official of Kanbawza Bank Ltd. Said that the managed float of the exchange rate at 820 kyat will reflect

a trading band at plus or minus 2 per cent per one U.S. dollar

The national budget for the year starting from April 1st is being evaluated and determined by the government of Myanmar with 800 kyat per dollar as official of the central bank reported.

Following a major breakthrough in its economic reforms particular in its currency, its aim is to stop the dual system which leads to confusion among foreign investors and come up with transparency and precision.

But there are instances where people are afraid and feel hesitant with this new reform because of what happened in the past just like the closing of many people's savings account which led to revolution the next year, report source from Reuters.

The chief executive of Leopard Capital Douglas Clayton said in Reuters report that he believe that with these reform it will enhance and improve foreign investment interest however, with this new shifting it is expected that there will be a disparity in supply and demand and this is not something to be worried about.

One of four Myanmar banks the Co-operative Bank Ltd has signed contracts on remittance with May bank considered to be Malaysia's largest lender to assists around 140,000 Myanmar migrant workers in Malaysia to send money to their beloved ones.

At present there are remarkable and favourable conditions when it comes to investments and other forms of businesses therefore the need for foreign exchange is very important to finance its economic expansion.

Though other businessmen like K K Hlaing said that the expectation of a distraction cause by this new rate is minimal since it has been regularly used in trading various businesses. By so doing the government is legalizing the unofficial exchange rates in the expected influx of business investments in the country for the coming days.

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Corruption is Burma's Biggest Problem: Upper House Speaker

By HPYO WAI THA / THE IRRAWADDY Monday, March 26, 2012



The Irrawaddy founder Aung Zaw, left, talks with Upper House Speaker Khin Aung Myint on Friday (23.03.2012). (Photo: Irrawaddy)

NAYPYIDAW— Fighting rampant corruption is the most important issue facing Burma today, said Upper House Speaker Khin Aung Myint in an exclusive interview with The Irrawaddy.

The ex-minister for culture said that existing anti-corruption legislation is out-of date and proposed amendments had already been approved by the Lower House, and would be submitted to the Union Parliament during the next session.

Six key ministries under the former military junta, all of which led by prominent members of the current administration, were accused of misusing billions of kyat in state funds in a government audit report released to members of Burma's Lower House of Parliament at the beginning of March.

Khin Aung Myint revealed that he has approved the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament to investigate how ministries spend their budgets, and the legislature will urge the government to take action where needed.

During an one-hour interview with The Irrawaddy founder Aung Zaw, the 67-year-old speaker also talked about the latest session of Parliament and related issues including military spending, an insider's viewpoint on the National Defense and Security Council and his attitude towards Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

He said that should the Nobel Peace Prize laureate join Parliament, it would be her decision whether to remain an MP or join a parliamentary committee.

"She's a knowledgeable and educated person with both a good international as well as national image. If she's in the Parliament, our capacity will increase and new ideas will come out. But how she will participate is up to her," said Khin Aung Myint on Friday after the end of the third session of Parliament.

The speaker admitted that the legislature's third session, which began in January, was overwhelmed by the budget plan for the next fiscal year. He admitted that the budget allocation for military spending is still high at 16 percent, but claimed it was relatively low in comparison with other countries' spending and that both Houses of Parliament approved the allocation.

And the former Major-General denied reports that the Parliament was always going to rubber-stamp military spending as the institution was heavily dominated by army officers and the military-dominated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), by saying that the budget session would not have taken so long if the assembly really was so biased.

"The military took only 25 percent of the seats and it doesn't make a great difference in voting," he said. "They even said 'yes' to the amnesty for the political prisoners. What all MPs did is for the interests of the country."

He added that the fledgling Parliament has recently become more active and dynamic than during earlier sessions when

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MPs would only discuss the needs of their constituencies. “Now we have more focus on policies, and are trying to implement our motto: 'the people's voice is our voice,' as well.”

As a member of the National Defense and Security Council—an 11-member government body with the power to declare states of emergency and appoint the commander-in-chief of defense services—the Upper House Speaker said that even although the council is approved by the Constitution, it cannot be involved in every issue of state affairs. Asked if there was a split between hard and softliners in the council, he answered “no division” with a laugh.

When Suu Kyi visited the Parliament last week, Khin Aung Myint told her not to be worried about the small presence of opposition seats. “I told her we would all support anything that would be good for the country and people,” he said.

When asked whether there had been any recent change in his attitude towards Suu Kyi, the former Major-General replied it would be wrong to think so.

“If we regard General Aung San [the independence hero who founded the Burmese Army and was Suu Kyi's father] as our father, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is our sister. I have never badmouthed her. I see her as my sister,” he added.
