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Free all political prisoners

burmaonlinecentre <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, Sat, 21. Apr 2012 02:26:33

NLD to boycott parliament as government refused to change oath -

<<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/04/21/nld-to-boycott-parliament-as-government-refused-to-change-oath/>>



Photo from NLDBurma

April 21, 2012 | Filed under: News,Politics | Posted by: Between Online News

The National League of Democracy and democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi who recently won in the April by-elections is intending to cease and refuse to deal with parliament since they disapprove the present constitutional oath.

This refusal by Ms. Suu Kyi and her party NLD marks the very first disagreement between her and President Thein Sein who allowed her candidacy to participate in the recent election.

The real reason is that the NLD wanted to replace the word "safeguard to the word "respect" which was included in the oath of office written by former military rulers but the present government has no plans of changing it, news report from AFP said.

According to spokesman Nyan Win, the NLD is doing all means by writing the presidential office to respectfully request the authorities to take into consideration but unfortunately the resolution may not be reviewed for the reason that it's just in time for the parliament to open on Monday and President Thein Sein is still in Japan for a state visit.

Suu Kyi and her party were invited among other parliamentarians to join and participate in their oath of office as they successfully won in the elections and a remarkable position in the lower house.

A lot of people states that Suu Kyi is needed by this present regime for she can be of help in the easing and lifting of sanctions by European countries. Furthermore, her presence in the parliament will strengthen and encourage the political system and attaining democracy will entirely benefit the people.

One of the many priorities she had to undertake is to set motion for the amendment of the 2008 constitution which in one section states that one quarter of the seats in parliament are set aside for military officials that is not legitimately elected.

The NLD has placed 43 out of the 44 seats in the parliament and they are the only opposition in the parliament that are under the government and its political associates. With the success of the election which is much-talked about and appreciated by various European countries and international communities are determined to suspend if not all the sanctions imposed on this country, according to AFP news reports.

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, [NLDmembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, Wed, 25. Apr 2012

Military reshuffles personnel in parliament

By DVB - Published: 24 April 2012 <<http://www.dvb.no/news/military-reshuffles-personnel-in-parliament/21685>>

Burma's state-run newspapers published an announcement yesterday from the Union Election Commission stating the military had replaced the Defence Services' parliamentary representatives with higher-ranking officers.

According to the announcement, 39 major-ranking military representatives in the People's Parliament were substituted with more senior officials, which included four brigadier generals, nine colonels and 26 lieutenant colonels. Similarly, 20 major ranking military representatives in the National Parliament were also replaced with four brigadier generals, five colonels and 11 lieutenant generals.

The military has swapped parliamentary representatives in the past but never in such large numbers.



Newly appointed members of parliament from the military attend a parliament meeting in Naypyitaw on 24 April 2012. (Reuters)

The replacements were made in the wake of recent by-elections that saw the National League for Democracy take a vast majority of the available seats.

The party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi has publicly stated that her party would work to amend the constitution, which guarantees military representatives a quarter of the legislative body's seats.

Currently, there are 322 civilian and 110 military representatives in the People's Parliament, while the National Parliament has 168 civilians and 56 military members.

According to section 141 of the constitution, "representatives who are the Defence Services personnel [are] nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services" and not elected by the people.

burmaonlinecentre <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] Suu Kyi still alive because of him says Khin Nyunt, Sat, 07. Apr 2012

Suu Kyi still alive because of him says Khin Nyunt

<<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/04/08/suu-kyi-still-alive-because-of-him-says-khin-nyunt/>>

April 8, 2012 | Filed under: News, Politics | Posted by: Between Online News

He saved the life of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi nine years ago said Khin Nyunt, former general and former prime minister of Myanmar, who was pardoned from house arrest early this year by the Thein Sein government, the Bangkok Post reported.

When Suu Kyi and her party members were traveling to Monywa, they were attacked by a pro-junta mob at the Depaying Township's outskirts in Sagaing Division on May 30, 2003. Myanmar's former spy chief Khin Nyunt said he saved Suu Kyi and her group.

According to opposition group about 50 people were killed in the Depayin Massacre, but there have never been confirmed on the death toll.

When Khin Nyunt was interviewed by the Bangkok Post on Sunday, he said that he sent his men to save Suu Kyi from the attack mob on that night and they grabbed her from the mob to safety place at nearby army cantonment.

Suu Kyi is regarded as his younger sister said Khin Nyunt, he is highly respecting her because of her determination for the democracy in Myanmar.

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 26 April 2012, Thu, 26. Apr 2012 21:10:45

Reuters - 26 April 2012 - <<http://news.yahoo.com/myanmar-parliament-stand-off-technical-matter-suu-kyi-081957547.html>>

Myanmar parliament stand-off a "technical matter:" Suu Kyi

YANGON (Reuters) - Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, said on Thursday that her party's refusal to take up newly won seats in parliament was a "technical matter" that could be resolved soon, responding to mounting criticism of her stance on the issue.

Her National League for Democracy (NLD) says it won't attend parliament unless the wording of the swearing-in oath is changed - the first sign of major friction with the ruling, army-backed party since the NLD swept historic by-elections on April 1. In her most detailed explanation of the NLD's thinking on the issue so far, Suu Kyi told reporters in Yangon on Thursday that the party was seeking to iron out "inconsistency" between the oath and the country's election laws.

"This is why I say it is a technical matter ... You can't say one thing in one place and another thing in another place. There has to be consistency," the Nobel Peace Laureate said during a news conference with Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi in the garden of her lake-side home.

"You mustn't forget that this is one of the major issues that prevented us from entering the 2010 elections."

The NLD is refusing to swear to "safeguard" the 2008 army-created constitution, which guarantees the military a substantial presence in parliament and which Suu Kyi has vowed to amend. It wants the word in the oath changed to "respect."

Suu Kyi's party only agreed to rejoin the electoral process last year after similar wording was removed from party registration laws. It boycotted 2010 elections that were widely criticized as rigged in favor of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which still dominates parliament.

Suu Kyi said the NLD did not want to "expand" the problem into a political issue and that she was still committed to working closely with President Thein Sein as the country rapidly opens up to the world after decades of isolation.

"We hope that the present problem will be smoothed over without too much difficulty before too long," Suu Kyi said.

The USDP parliamentary leader this week rejected any change to the oath, but other parties are seeking to build support for a compromise proposal, party representatives told Reuters in the administrative capital Naypyitaw this week.

Aye Maung, the leader of the ethnic Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, said he was trying to negotiate with the NLD and USDP to find a solution.

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 24 April 2012, Tue, 24. Apr 2012 17:48:26

The Independent.co.uk/ - Monday 23 April 2012

William Hague warning over change to sanctions

in Burma - <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/william-hague-warning-over-change-to-sanctions-in-burma-7669621.html>>

Foreign Secretary William Hague warned today against moving too fast to lift sanctions against Burma despite a "very important process of change" in the country.

He was speaking at talks in Luxembourg as the beacon of Burmese change - Aung San Suu Kyi - boycotted the opening of the new parliament in a dispute highlighting daily difficulties on the path to democratic reform.

Mr Hague said that was why suspending, rather than removing, current EU sanctions against Burma was the right thing to do.

"A very important process of change is taking place in Burma," he said on arrival for talks with fellow EU foreign ministers.

"The UK has advocated the suspension of sanctions rather than complete lifting of them.

"That is the right thing to do - great progress is being made (towards opening up Burma), but we remain concerned about ethnic conflict, political prisoners, and the swearing-in of opposition members of parliament."

Earlier Ms Suu Kyi and other elected members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party boycotted the opening of parliament in protest at a requirement to sign an oath to "safeguard" the Burmese constitution - a constitution the NLD wants to change.

Mr Hague, who visited Burma in January ahead of David Cameron's meeting there with Ms Suu Kyi after her landmark election victory, made clear it was too early to be over-confident about the degree of likely change.

The Foreign Secretary insisted: "They (EU sanctions) can be re-imposed if Burma turns in the wrong direction."

EU foreign policy chief Baroness Ashton, chairing today's talks, agreed that the suspension of sanctions was the cautious way forward.

She said: "We must recognise the tremendous changes that have taken place by suspending sanctions - apart from the arms embargo - and we look forward to working to support the development of Burma. We are closely watching events."

Ministers fear the Burmese parliamentary protest by the NLD could set back change, but argue that postponing today's suspension of EU sanctions would be counter-productive.

Instead the "carrot" of revived trade and investment opportunities after years of Burmese isolation is seen as the right response to the democratic steps taken so far.

Ms Suu Kyi insisted there was no "boycott" of parliament - just a limited protest at being expected to support a constitution enshrining a military-based political system which the NLD has pledged to change. *****

Betweenonline - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/04/19/hkun-tun-oo-genuine-changes-in-myanmar-depend-on-2015-elections/>>

Hkun Tun Oo: Betweenonline - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/04/19/hkun-tun-oo-genuine-changes-in-myanmar-depend-on-2015-elections/>>

Genuine changes in Myanmar depend on 2015 elections

April 19, 2012 | Filed under: News,Politics | Posted by: Between Online News



Prime Minister of Britain David Cameron on his visit to Myanmar last April 13 asked significant questions addressed to President Thein Sein such as if the President is committed on genuinely pushing for a total democracy in his country.

In a rejoinder made by Hkun Tun Oo, leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) conveyed that the 2015 general election is one issue where danger will be imminent since the recent regime is faced with no plans of turnover of power especially if the National League for Democracy (NLD) will victoriously win again in this coming election. He is pleased with the changes that is ongoing but with doubts on his mind, expressed his point of views on the following reasons why queries are still inevitable, said news report from SHAN.

First, he is concerned on the conditions of hundreds of political prisoners still languishing in jail. Secondly two ethnic territories are still at war and conflict with the military despite the peace treaties signed by all concerned parties. Third reason is that the government has planned to amend the 2008 constitution but up to this date no proposition has been furnished and this creates suspicion on whether or not Thein Sein will take charge of the army.

Fourth on his list is that the President overrules the parliament which to him appears that people like him is not in a position to give up his power. It only shows that by this coming general election of 2015, they might not give up whatever government position they are holding at present in case the NLD will prevail in the running race just like in the 1990 election.

Lastly this concerns the ethnic people in which no constitution that was put into writing that support and protect their rights and privileges. There was no indication from the constitution of 1947, 1974 and 2008 that declares their rights to be encouraged. Peace is not attainable if the existence of the present constitution prevails. With the influx of business investment in the country, it will only benefit and profit those in the military and not on its people, he said.

According to Dr. Aye Tha Aung of Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), the constitution of 2008 needs to be amended based on the 1947 Panglong Agreement which emphasizes the "Full autonomy on internal administration, to respect the rights and privileges of the people, and financial autonomy. This will give advantage to all ethnic groups in promoting their welfare and upliftment of their well-being, SHAN news reported.

Other active members who participated included U Hla Saw, Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), Kachin pastor Reverend Samson, Dr Simon Tha (Karen) and U Tha Aye (Rohingya) and they are one in saying that the lifting of sanctions be put to halt while waiting for the next election come 2015.

burmaonlinecentre <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK@yahoo.com, April 9,

Between News - News about Myanmar – Burma, <<http://www.betweenonline.com/2012/04/09/knu-leader-zipporah-sein-meets-suu-kyi-in-yangon/>>

KNU leader Zipporah Sein meets Suu Kyi in Yangon

April 9, 2012 | Filed under: News,Politics | Posted by: Between Online News

Democratic icon Aung San Suu Kyi met with the Karen rebel groups last Sunday where the national interests of both parties is to attain peace and harmony. General Secretary Zipporah Sein of the Karen National Union (KNU) had met and had a talk which lasted for two hours, news report from Monster and Critics said.

This is her first time in Yangon and her objective is to accomplish the peace treaty with Myanmar authorities and to put an end to hostilities and warfare in that state which started in the year 1948.

The peace pact is to seek a wide range of national reconciliation among all the various ethnic insurgency groups and to help relocate the tens of thousands of people in the Karen state who were forced to leave their homes because of heavy fighting and conflicts and also for their safety measures.

President Thein Sein met with Zipporah and her delegates who flew on a special flight to Naypyitaw which is 350 kilometers north of Yangon. This move initiated by the Karen group is their first ever after many years of resistance and fighting against the government for independence in their own homeland in eastern Myanmar.

Zipporah expressed her deepest appreciation towards the members of National League for Democracy and to Suu Kyi to which she addressed the important implication of achieving genuine peace and unity among the ethnic groups.

The main concern that Suu Kyi and the minority groups has settled and established upon is to give priority in amending the constitution of 2008 giving the ethnic minorities the right of self rule in their areas. Since she won a seat in the parliament in the by-elections, she is likely to promote and be able to attain a peaceful relationship between the government and the ethnic insurgency groups.

The Western country had emphasized to the authorities that they should take into full account the upliftment of the rights and welfare of the ethnic groups who constitute 30 per cent of the country's population so as to enable them to lift various sanctions imposed in the country.

THE BURMANET NEWS, An email newsletter covering Burma, April 7-9, 2012, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Irrawaddy - <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/2234>>

Thein Sein, Suu Kyi meet KNU for first time – Saw Yan Naing



A delegation of KNU leaders holds talks with government representatives at the Sedona Hotel in Rangoon on April 6. (Photo: The Irrawaddy)

A delegation of Karen National Union (KNU) leaders expressed optimism about Burma's prospects for peace following their first-ever meetings over the weekend with President Thein Sein in Naypyidaw and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon.

Following the meeting with Thein Sein on Saturday, the KNU leaders said they had constructive talks with the president. They added that Thein Sein had spoken of the possibility of removing the KNU from the list of unlawful associations, as the group had requested.

"We learned that President U Thein Sein is a person who really wants peace," Naw Zipporah Sein, general secretary of the KNU, told reporters in Naypyidaw after meeting with the President.

The KNU leaders also expressed their positive view on the internal peace and reform process and their desire to participate in the process until success is achieved.

Regarding their meeting with Suu Kyi on Sunday, Zipporah Sein said the KNU representatives were able to exchange views about the peace process with Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) colleagues and hoped to cooperate with the opposition leader in the near future.

At a meeting with a Burmese government peace delegation led by Railways Minister Aung Min on Friday, the KNU focused on six points, including the need for a nationwide ceasefire and an end to various human rights abuses to ensure the people's "freedom from fear."

The KNU has also opened two liaison offices in Pegu and Tenasserim divisions to enable better communication with Burmese governments in the future.

Aung Min told reporters in Rangoon that the two sides are planning to open additional liaison offices in the future.

Immigration Minister Khin Yi told reporters at Sedona Hotel in Rangoon that the government wants to implement the entire peace process through to the end.

“We want to go to a complete process. In our peace process, we want to include a demining project and resettlement program for internally displaced persons and refugees,” he said.

He also said that the KNU’s status as an unlawful association would be changed at an appropriate time, and that it had been imposed under different circumstances.

Naw May Oo Mudraw, a spokesperson for the KNU peace delegation, said that some representatives from both the KNU and the Burmese government visited a local village in Kyaukgyi Township in Pegu Division to learn more about the needs of civilians who had been displaced by decades of conflict between the two sides.

She said about 3,000 residents greeted the KNU peace delegation as they traveled to Kyaukgyi, where one of the KNU’s new liaison offices is located.

She added that the KNU was welcomed by Karen and other ethnic people wherever they traveled within government-controlled territory.

“We got great support not only from Karen people but also from other ethnic people who have suffered from war. They seem to have a great deal of hope that our peace process will succeed and that it will improve their lives,” said Naw May Oo Mudraw.

The KNU delegation also shared its strategy for the peace process with Suu Kyi. The group has been engaging in negotiations with the Burmese government since late last year.

Suu Kyi said she welcomed the peace process, adding that achieving peace within Burma is one of the NLD’s top priorities as it prepares to go to Parliament for the first time later this month following a landslide victory in by-elections on April 1.

The KNU has agreed to continue holding peace talks with the Burmese government. The KNU peace delegation is expected to return to the group’s base on the Thai-Burmese border on April 11.

The KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the government’s peace negotiation team in the Karen State capital of Pa-an on Jan. 12. The current discussions form the second round of peace talks aimed at cementing an understanding between the two parties.

Founded in 1947, the KNU is the oldest ethnic armed group in Burma and has been fighting against the central government for greater autonomy since 1949, when it formed its military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army.

THE BURMANET NEWS - April 5, 2012 Issue #4375, email newsletter covering Burma, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Economist - [By-elections in Myanmar](http://www.economist.com/node/21552232) - <<http://www.economist.com/node/21552232>>

The Lady of all landslides - Apr 7th 2012 | YANGON | from the print edition

Aung San Suu Kyi’s win is a humiliation for the army. Will it now turn nasty?

THE boisterous, joyful scenes throughout the evening of April 1st outside the headquarters in Yangon of the National League for Democracy (NLD) said it all. Myanmar’s main opposition party was on course for a huge victory in the day’s historic by-elections. Every ten minutes or so news of yet another unfeasibly good result would be posted up on a digital display screen facing the street, provoking even more ecstatic cheering from the huge crowd gathered outside. These were extraordinary scenes in a country that just over a year ago was a hushed and fearful military dictatorship.

Over the following days the government confirmed the NLD’s landslide. The party contested 44 of the 45 seats on offer to the federal parliament in Naypyidaw. These were the first elections it had taken part in since 1990, and it won 43 of them (the government’s single win came in a constituency where the NLD candidate was disqualified). The result surpassed the party’s most optimistic expectations. In some seats they seem to have won over 90% of the vote, including in a hardscrabble constituency on the edge of the capital, where hardly a vote was cast against Aung San Suu Kyi.

The NLD’s triumph spells humiliation for the regime. Support for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the

proxy for an army that has ruled the country since 1962, was all but wiped out in these constituencies. It could not even win a seat in the government's own backyard. Four were up for grabs in the regime's gaudy capital of Naypyidaw, where perhaps half the voters are directly employed by the government. They had been promised extra goodies to support the USDP. But still, they voted for the NLD.

The victory is more symbolic than practical. The NLD won only 6% of the 650-odd seats in parliament. Its participation will make little legislative difference, and the army remains very much in charge. One NLD leader, Tin Oo, hopes that the mere presence of Miss Suu Kyi in parliament will shake things up, and that her oratory will change some minds. Maybe, but the 2008 constitution reserves a quarter of the seats for army-appointed MPs who know exactly where to take their orders from.

Rather, it is to the 2015 general election that everyone is now looking. The previous vote, in late 2010, was heavily rigged in favour of the USDP, which won most of the seats, if only because the NLD boycotted the poll. Were Sunday's by-election results repeated at the national level, the USDP would be annihilated, reduced to a parliamentary rump of its unelected military MPs. At that point, the game would pretty much be up for the army. The NLD and opposition parties from the areas of the ethnic Karen, Kachin and others would have a majority and Miss Suu Kyi, perhaps, would be president.

Though the NLD can hardly wait for that day, the prospect must deeply worry the generals and their satraps. Their reaction to these by-elections will thus be watched closely over the coming weeks. The generals may well have wanted Miss Suu Kyi to take up a seat in parliament, in order to reflect well on the reform process begun by President Thein Sein. But their own ritual humiliation was not part of the plan. They have very publicly been stripped of all legitimacy.

Mid-ranking officers in Naypyidaw are said to be "angry". The worry is that they will now turn against Mr Thein Sein, who they may fear is leading them to political oblivion. Some factions of the army were never happy with the reform programme in the first place, let alone with its hectic pace. Defeat in by-elections could provide them with the pretext to try to stall further reforms, or maybe even to turn back the clock. Mr Thein Sein called the by-elections "successful", and some army officers hope that Myanmar will follow Indonesia's example a dozen years ago and take the path towards democracy. But diplomats and other foreign observers admit that the army is a closed book to outsiders.

That is why the euphoria is tinged with danger. Myanmar is entering a decisive phase in its political transition. The diehards in the army's higher command now face having quickly to come to terms with a process that, for the first time, looks as if it is slipping beyond their control. Or they will have to act while they still can.

Miss Suu Kyi, modest in victory, has helped. She insisted her supporters not indulge in triumphalism. But now it is up to the officers whether Myanmar is truly to enjoy the "new era" Miss Suu Kyi proclaimed the day after her triumph. Everyone knows where she now stands: just outside the presidential palace.

Burma News - 3 April 2012 - "Burma News" <burma_news@verizon.ne>, Wed, 04. Apr 2012 06:26:59

The Diplomat - April 3, 2012 - <<http://the-diplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2012/04/03/can-burmas-military-let-go/>>

Can Burma's Military Let Go? - By Trefor Moss April 3, 2012

It's hard to imagine a more dramatic shift of tactics. Less than five years ago, the Burmese military, the Tatmadaw, greeted popular calls for change with batons and bullets, crushing the "saffron revolution" with its trademark brutality. But at the weekend, the men in khaki were conspicuous by their absence during elections that were relatively free and that appear to have swept Aung San Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy (NLD) candidates into parliament.

Nonetheless, it would be naïve to imagine that an institution that held absolute power for the last half century would now meekly accept the role of wallflower at Burma's democracy party. The military remains a key actor in national affairs, and the reform process can only succeed if the Tatmadaw is made to feel that it, too, stands to be one of the winners in the country's transformation. And that means two things: that the Tatmadaw has to be compensated for its loss of political power; and that the civilian government has to refrain from crossing any of the military leadership's red lines.



If the Burmese economy is poised to grow at the pace that some economists are now predicting, then paying off the military should be straightforward enough. The national budget announced in March included a large pay rise for the Tatmadaw: that's a good incentive for the top brass to stick with Thein Sein's government, especially given the miserable pay and conditions that Burmese troops currently have to put up with. No less important than the official defense budget are the off-the-books business ventures that the Burmese military engages in. These will become even more profitable as the national economy begins to open up, and, if the Indonesian precedent is anything to go by, turning a blind eye to these often shady money-making schemes will be a necessary evil for the reformist government in the short to medium term.

While the logic of a military takeover is usually very easy to understand, the logic of why a military government chooses to cede power is far more complex. It will take some years for scholars to build up a complete picture of why the floodgates of reform have been allowed to open so dramatically in Burma after so many decades of military obstructionism.

However, while the Tatmadaw has evidently recognized the need to relinquish sole political power, it no doubt intends to retain some political influence. As Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, Burma's military chief, said in the run-up to the recent by-elections, "performing the duty of national politics" remains one of the Tatmadaw's priorities. So attempting to extract the military from politics, at least for several years, looks like being the first of its red lines.

What else might provoke the Tatmadaw to halt the country's democratization? The small scale of the recent by-elections – only 45 seats were up for grabs, out of a total of 664 in Naypyidaw's upper and lower houses of parliament – was clearly not enough to trigger a reaction. The stakes weren't unacceptably high.

However, general elections in 2015 could be a different story. An NLD landslide – the likely outcome judging by the by-election results – might trigger a repeat of the 1990 coup, unless the military is given some cast-iron guarantees about the future shape of Burma and the Army's place within it. What the Tatmadaw surely can't accept is defeat at the hands of an enemy it has been fighting for 50 years – namely forces that, in its worldview, want to break up Burma. For all his reformist credentials, the ex-general turned president, Thein Sein, presumably shares this outlook.

There can therefore be no question of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD being permitted to take control without the Tatmadaw being made to trust their agenda. This would cover negotiations with ethnic minorities, the military's future political role, assurances that old regime figures and their families won't be prosecuted, and probably many other distasteful promises. As Aung San Suu Kyi prepares for parliament, it's highly doubtful whether that degree of trust currently exists. She has three years in which to build a lot of bridges, or risk another disastrous face-off with a military that will be feeling insecure and no longer in control after the weekend of voting.

THE BURMANET NEWS, An email newsletter covering Burma, April 27, 2012 Issue #4392, Editor <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

Reuters - April 27, 2012 - <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/world/2012/04/26/military-flexes-muscle-amid-suu-kyi-no-show/>>

Analysis: Myanmar's military moves amid Suu Kyi no-show -

Andrew R.C. Marshall -



Aung San Suu Kyi

A political stalemate preventing the long-awaited parliamentary debut of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi coincides with an apparent attempt by the powerful military to bolster its influence in the legislature.

Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) colleagues swept 43 of 45 seats contested in April 1 by-elections but now she and other NLD MPs elect are refusing to swear a parliamentary oath to "safeguard" a 2008 constitution, which they say is undemocratic.

They want the word in the oath changed to "respect."

The stalemate has unsettled party faithful who are eager for the NLD to help tackle their country's myriad problems, while perplexing analysts who say the NLD's gambit risks being seen as pedantic, ill-timed, and needlessly confrontational.

"It's a very high-risk strategy for political gains that are not quite clear," says Richard Horsey, a former United Nations official in Myanmar. "It's wasting precious time that could be spent on actual policymaking."

The NLD is holding its ground in the evident hope that a deal can be brokered with the help of reformist President Thein Sein and the speakers of the upper and lower houses.

"Different views are the essence of democracy," says Myat Nyana Soe, a member of parliament who recently switched parties to join the NLD. "We hope the majority will respect the view of the minority."

The NLD's no-show coincides with an effort by the military to strengthen its position in parliament, where its officers are guaranteed a quarter of seats under the constitution.

Fifty-nine majors were replaced with senior officers ranked from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, Myanmar's selection commission announced on April 22.

The move anticipates the eventual arrival of the NLD's small but vocal contingent.

"It's quite clear that the replacement of these young majors with higher ranking officials is to make military representation stronger and make their voice heard louder inside the parliament," said a lower house member, who declined to be identified.

The oath stalemate will mystify many in Myanmar, an impoverished country of 60 million people where fretting about constitutional semantics comes a very distant second to daily concerns about lack of jobs, healthcare and educational opportunities.

But Suu Kyi's passion for changing the constitution, which also allows the president to hand power to the armed forces chief in an ill-defined emergency, should come as no surprise.

The drafting of the constitution was tightly controlled by the military, which ruled harshly for nearly 50 years following a 1962 coup, and guarantees it a leading role in politics.

Now, after the military officially stepped back in favor of a reformist, quasi-civilian government, a new confrontation could be looming.

While Suu Kyi has recently hinted at the need for the military to get out of politics, the armed forces commander has spoken of the need for the military to protect the constitution that gives it a "leadership role".

One of Suu Kyi's main promises during her election campaign was to amend the constitution, while NLD campaign manager Nyan Win told Reuters in March that charter change would be Suu Kyi's "very first priority" upon entering parliament.

"SHOULD BE IN PARLIAMENT"

The NLD convincingly won an election in 1990, but the military junta annulled the result and mercilessly persecuted Suu Kyi and her supporters. Since then, Suu Kyi's party has consistently refused to participate in junta-backed initiatives.

In 1995, NLD members walked out of a constitution-drafting assembly convened by the junta. They also boycotted 2010 elections that were widely criticized as rigged in favor of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which now dominates parliament.

In 1998, between spells under house arrest, she sat in a car for six days on a country road after police stopped her visiting party members. Diplomats said she used that stand-off to undermine the ruling junta's claim that she was free to move about the country.

What she hopes to prove from the standoff over the oath eludes even potential allies. "The oath is nothing," says Zung Hlei Thang, an MP with the ethnic Chin Progressive Party. "It doesn't create any hindrance for amending the constitution."

"The NLD should be in parliament, where they can raise any issue - corruption, rule of law and, of course, amending the constitution," said Kyaw Zwa Moe, managing editor of Irrawaddy Publishing Group, a news organization founded by Myanmar exiles in Thailand.

He suspected the decision was a last-minute one taken in the euphoric wake of the by-elections, in which the NLD trounced its arch-rival, the USDP.

MP Myat Nyana Soe said the decision was made by the party's Central Executive Committee. Four of its seven members are MPs elect, including Suu Kyi.

The stalemate could also be testing voters' faith in Suu Kyi, who is widely revered in Myanmar. "People are quite worried that their vote will be useless," says Nyo Ohn Myint, an exiled NLD leader.

Aye Maung, of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, played down the standoff. He noted that a foreign investment law was the only major legislation to be decided before parliament's current session expires at the end of April, and that all sides had "plenty of time" to work out a compromise.

But USDP secretary general Htay Oo told Reuters on Monday his party would not introduce any proposal to change the oath. "The wording would have no impact on the development of the country," he said.

While the NLD's seats lie empty, the military's decision to fill its quota with higher-ranking delegates was an "obvious recognition" of parliament's growing importance, said Horsey.

The soldier-delegates were now "thinking for themselves and are allowed to vote independently," he said. "They're studying the issues. In that case, is it really captains and majors you want?"

NLD member Nyo Ohn Myint saw the hand of retired dictator Senior General Than Shwe in the newly appointed military delegates.

"They are all hardliners," he said. "General Than Shwe has woken up and might take the opportunity to derail the democratic process."

