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Yangon, Mar 11 (AFP)

Detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi today called on Myanmar's people to give a united response to an "unjust" election law that bars her from the vote, her lawyer Nyan Win told AFP

Free all political prisoners, free Aung San Suu Kyi, free Burma.

THE BURMANET NEWS - March 11, 2010, Issue #3914 - "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org - BB News - Aung Thu <aungthu@t-online.de>

Suu Kyi calls on Myanmar to respond to 'unjust' law

AFP <<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/57538/suu-kyi-calls-myanmar-respond.html>>

<<http://www.dvb.no/elections/suu-kyi-demands-response-to-%E2%80%98unjust%E2%80%99-law/>> Yangon, Mar 11 (AFP)



"The people and political forces have to respond united to such an unjust law," Suu Kyi said, according to Nyan Win, after he visited the democracy icon at her house. "She didn't think such a repressive law would come out."

Under new election legislation Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi faces exclusion from her own National League for Democracy (NLD) party and is not allowed to stand in elections this year on the grounds that she is a serving prisoner.

Nyan Win said Suu Kyi seemed resolute and "more cheerful" than expected during the meeting, saying there must also be a party response to the new laws, which have been denounced internationally as undemocratic.

"She is not upset by it. She said a concrete response has to be made from our side... We cannot say how we will respond at the

moment," Nyan Win said, adding that he would consult with the party's elders.



Myanmar's ruling junta today appointed an election commission made up of 17 handpicked members, to oversee this year's polls that analysts expect will be held in October or November. The US said the new electoral laws, unveiled by the regime on Monday, made a "mockery" of democracy, while UN chief Ban Ki-moon appealed to the junta to free Suu Kyi and let her take part.

ThaungN@aol.com, Tue, 23. Mar 2010 16:11:03

(Reuters) - <<http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-47155420100323>>

Detained Suu Kyi says would snub Myanmar polls

By Aung Hla Tun (2010-03-23)

YANGON (Reuters) - Myanmar's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said on Tuesday she "would not dream" of registering her party for this year's elections, but added the decision was not for her to make, according to her lawyer.



Filipino activists chant slogans while displaying a poster of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, during a rally by dozens of Free Burma Coalition groups in Manila

Suu Kyi, who has been detained for 15 of the last 21 years, would refuse to sign her party up for the polls because of "unjust" election laws, but insisted the comment was not an order or an instruction to other members.

"Personally, I would not dream of registering the NLD under such an unjust and one-sidedly drawn-up state constitution," her lawyer and National League for Democracy (NLD) party member, Nyan Win, quoted Suu Kyi as saying after meeting the Nobel laureate.

The charismatic Suu Kyi is unable to run in the much-derided election because of her marriage to a foreigner, British citizenship of her children and her criminal record.

Critics say the military government is fearful of her huge popularity and international appeal and has sought to keep her under lock and key to minimize her influence.

The NLD party, which won the last polls in 1990 by a landslide but was never allowed to rule, has yet to make a decision

on whether it will take part in this year's election, a date for which has yet to be announced.

There is disagreement among the NLD's 128 committee members on whether to take part in the elections.

Some say the constitution is a farce and are in favor of a boycott, which other members believe such a decision would make the country's biggest opposition party a spent political force.

"There are some who would like to go ahead but most are against it," Nyan Win said, adding that the party would make its decision on March 29.

Myanmar's military, which has ruled the former British colony for almost five decades, recently annulled the result of the 1990 vote, stating in official media that it did not comply with new rules passed this month.

"MOCKERY OF DEMOCRACY"

The laws also say parties that register for the elections must exclude members serving prison terms, a rule the United States said made a mockery of democracy. Parties that fail to register could be dissolved by the junta.

Many senior NLD members are among more than 2,000 prisoners of conscience in Myanmar, where the regime denies detaining anyone because of their political views.

Nyan Win said the NLD had filed a lawsuit against the regime regarding the new laws, but it was rejected by the Supreme Court.

Separately, two new political parties registered with the newly formed election commission on Tuesday, party sources told Reuters.

They were the 88 Generation Students of the Union of Myanmar (GSUM) and the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF) parties.

Both are regarded as being close to the military, which will automatically be given 25 percent of seats in parliament.

Analysts say the junta, which will retain full control of key ministries, will likely field proxy parties so it can dominate the lower house and restrict the powers of elected opponents.

Critics say the election, which is the final part of the junta's drawn out "road map" to democracy, will be a sham aimed at creating a facade of civilian rule with the military still calling the shots.

(Writing by Martin Petty; Editing by Raju Gopalakrishnan)

ThaungN@aol.com - Wed, 10. Mar 2010 04:23:46

YANGON, Myanmar March 9, 2010 (AP)

New law bars Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from election-

<<http://service.gmx.net/de/cgi/g.fcgi/application/navigator?CUSTOMERNO=2371110&t=uk1074425263.1268580654.106cb8e5>>



(AP Photo/Khin Maung Win) (AP)

Members of the detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy Party read state-run newspapers carrying military government's announcement on election laws at the party's headquarters in Yangon, Myanmar Tuesday, March. 9, 2010. Myanmar's ruling junta will appoint the commission that will have final say over the country's first elections in two decades, state-run newspapers announced Tuesday as the country's military rulers began unveiling the laws that will govern this year's balloting.

(AP)

A new election law issued by Myanmar's ruling military has barred pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from joining a political party and thus running in upcoming elections, state-run newspapers said Wednesday.

The Political Parties Registration Law, published in official newspapers, excludes anyone convicted by a court of law from participating in the elections.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who has spent 14 of the past 20 years in detention, was convicted last August of violating the terms of her house arrest by briefly sheltering an American who swam uninvited to her lakeside residence. She was sentenced to a new term of house arrest that is to end this November.

The sentence was seen as a way to keep Suu Kyi locked up during the election campaign. Last month, the Supreme Court dismissed her latest appeal for freedom.

The election law says that political parties have 60 days from Monday, when the law was promulgated, to register with an Election Committee whose members are to be appointed by the junta.

The date of the elections has not been announced, and Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party has not said whether it will contest the balloting.

The law also bars members of religious orders and civil servants from joining political parties.

The regime enacted five election-related laws on Monday, two of which have now been made public. Three more are to be unveiled in coming days.

The government announced in 2008 that elections will take place sometime in 2010. The last elections in 1990 were won overwhelmingly by Suu Kyi's party, but the military refused to hand over power.

Her party says the new constitution of 2008 is unfair and gives the military controlling say in government

[BurmaCampaign] Anna Roberts <anna.roberts@burmacampaign.org.uk>

guardian.co.uk, Thursday 25 March 2010 22.07 GMT

UK backs move to refer Burma's leaders to war crimes tribunal - Simon Tisdall

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/25/uk-backs-case-against-burma>>

UN envoy calls for referral of junta to Hague court - Security council 'not unanimous' over measure



Under current rules, Aung San Suu Kyi and other past or present political prisoners are barred from standing in the election. Photograph: Hla Hla Htay/AFP/Getty Images

Britain is backing moves to refer [Burma's](#) military leaders to the international criminal court for investigation into [war crimes](#) and crimes against humanity. The move is part of a heightened campaign to force the junta to embrace genuine democratic reforms, diplomatic and government sources told the Guardian today.

In a tough *démarche* that will increase pressure on the isolated regime ahead of planned elections this autumn, Britain's ambassador to the UN said the UK supported a recommendation by the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Burma that The Hague-based international court opens a war crimes investigation.

Speaking after a security council meeting, Sir Mark Lyall Grant said the council's five permanent members were "not sufficiently unanimous" in

their views to allow an ICC referral to happen immediately. But if such a proposal were tabled, he said, Britain would support it. Nearly 200 MPs have backed the referral campaign.

Britain, the former colonial power, is keen to use the threat of security council action to press the junta into dropping new rules that exclude political prisoners, past and present, from standing for election or belonging to political parties.

"Our number one objective is to increase pressure on the regime to clarify the election rules and hold free and fair elections," a British official said. The UK was pursuing the issue "robustly" with the US, France and other like-minded states at the UN and in other forums, such as the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the official added.

If Burma's junta refuses to change the election rules and opposition parties are forced into a boycott, Britain is understood to be ready to propose a tough range of EU economic sanctions. Any decision on proposing such sanctions would be made by Gordon Brown, who has taken a personal interest in the plight of the Burmese people, and could come as early next week.

A government source said the election rules were "clearly taking the piss" and were not a serious effort to democratise the country, a view that was increasingly shared by Burma's neighbours in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

An announcement of an election date could come within the next few days, the source said. "This will clearly be a big moment for the regime and there is no sign they will change course. So all our efforts will be focused on trying to make sure there is a chorus of condemnation and making clear that they [the polls] won't do anything to legitimise the regime."

Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD), the largest opposition party led by the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest, is expected to announce on Monday whether it will register to participate in the elections. As matters stand, she and many of the NLD's other leading figures would be automatically disqualified because they have served, or are serving jail terms.

"If [Aung San] Suu Kyi decides to pull out, that will be the death knell for the elections," the British source said.

Aung San Suu Kyi was quoted this week by her lawyer as saying she opposed the NLD's participation, but that the decision was not hers alone. "Personally I would not dream of registering the NLD under such an unjust and one-sidedly drawn-up state constitution," she said.

The junta's decision to hold elections, the first since 1990 when the NLD won in a landslide, is widely seen as an effort to gain international respectability for the regime and end US and EU sanctions. But activists and human rights groups have already denounced the rules of the poll.

Welcoming Britain's backing for an ICC referral, Anna Roberts, the director of Burma Campaign UK, said: "The generals in Burma will never allow justice and democracy ... Rather than engaging with the fake elections, the international community should focus on putting the generals in jail, where they belong."

The campaign to bring war crimes charges against junta members, including General Than Shwe, Burma's de facto head of state, received a boost this month when the UN's special rapporteur, Tomás Ojea Quintana, described "a pattern of gross and systematic violation of human rights" of Burmese civilians. The abuses, including killings, rape, torture, ethnic cleansing and forced labour, were the result of long-standing state policy, he said.

The Irrawaddy, Newsletter for Wednesday, March 10, 2010, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The NLD's Dilemma

- <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18005>

By BA KAUNG

Wednesday, March 10, 2010



Members of the National League for Democracy read about Burma's new election law at the party's headquarters in Rangoon. (Photo: AP)

May 7 is the deadline for Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), to finally decide whether it will continue to exist as a legal party after twenty years of unsuccessful struggle against the military dictatorship.

"Our party is facing a great dilemma," he said.

The regime announced the enactment of its election laws on March 8. Within 60 days from the announcement date, the NLD and other currently legal parties have to apply for registration to the election commission. If they fail to do so, they will automatically cease to exist as legal entities.

The party would also have to expel Suu Kyi if it decides to register at the election commission because political parties are prohibited from having a prisoner as a party member, according

to the election law revealed on Wednesday.

Suu Kyi is serving an 18-month term of house arrest, reduced from an original sentence of three years' hard labor for briefly sheltering an American citizen in August, 2009. With her sentence due to expire in November, Suu Kyi cannot be a member of any political party if she is not released before May 7.

"If our party registers, this would mean that we have to cancel our call for a review of the regime's Constitution and at the same time expel our leader," Nyan Win said. "If we don't, the party will cease to exist."

Nyan Win said that the party would try to convene a meeting between Suu Kyi and members of the party's Central Executive Committee. "We will approach the government to allow that to happen."

Not only is Suu Kyi not allowed to be a member of a political party member, she is also not allowed to lead any political party if the polls are held before her release from detention, according to the party registration law.

Chapter II, Article 4 (e) of the Political Parties Registration Law specifies: "A person convicted by a court and currently serving a jail term or the person in the process of a legal pursuit against the jail term for a review of it at a court are not eligible to found a political party."

Burma's highest court last month rejected Suu Kyi's appeal against her continued detention. Nyan Win said they will try to exhaust all legal efforts appealing against the sentence.

While the election laws are meticulously framed to exclude Suu Kyi from participating in the polls, Suu Kyi herself has yet to make her position on the election clear.

On Wednesday, the Burmese state-run newspapers carried comments by the regime's prime minister, Gen. Thein Sein, who alluded to Suu Kyi at a meeting in Shan State on Tuesday, saying: "No Burmese citizen could be a stooge or an agent of an alien nation in disguise of a Myanmar [Burmese]."

Thein Sein's remarks were carried in state-run newspapers under banner headlines on Wednesday. He made similar remarks last month that were also highlighted by the state-run newspapers.

The military-drafted 2008 Constitution already bars Suu Kyi from holding the offices of President or Vice President since its provisions state that anyone whose spouse or children are citizens of a foreign country are not eligible to hold these positions. Suu Kyi was married to a British national and her two sons living in the United Kingdom hold British citizenship.

The junta election laws have been crafted to make sure that all political prisoners, including Suu Kyi, the 88 Generation students leaders and Khun Htun Oo, the leader of Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), which won the most seats in the 1990 election after the NLD, will be excluded from Burma's election.

Even if the NLD and SNLD decide to expel their leaders and register at the election commission before May 7 to avoid dissolution, according to the new party registration law, they face a further threat of dissolution if they decide not to participate in the election expected to be held in October.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Saturday, March 13, 2010, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Junta Bans Election News - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18035

By THE IRRAWADDY - Saturday, March 13, 2010



Street vendors sort newspapers reporting on new election laws in Rangoon. (Photo: AP)

In the latest sign that this year's vote will be neither free nor fair, Burma's ruling junta has ordered censors to ban reports on new election laws and other controversial election-related issues, according to Rangoon-based journalists.

"Soon after the election laws were announced, we interviewed members of various political parties to get their views on this subject," said the chief editor of one Rangoon-based journal. "But when we submitted our reports to the censor board, we were told we couldn't publish them."

Besides the recently announced election laws, the journals are also forbidden to report on the situation of the opposition National League for

Democracy, which faces dissolution if it refuses to expel its leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

„Except for 'optimistic' news that is identical to what we can find in the state-run newspapers, we are not permitted to write

anything about the election,” the editor said

“There are pro-government parties and opposition parties. We can't say it's fair if the regime only allows us to report on what the pro-government parties are saying,” said a Rangoon-based reporter.

According to sources in Rangoon, a special body has been formed to oversee the work of the Press Scrutiny Board during the election period. The censor board must now submit draft publications to a “special security force” consisting of high-ranking officials, including Lt-Gen Myint Swe, who is close to junta head Sen-Gen Than Shwe.

Most of the private weekly journals in Rangoon, including The Myanmar Times, Biweekly Eleven, Modern and 7 Day News, have had articles pulled by the censor board because they touched on sensitive issues related to the election, sources said.

The Irrawaddy - Newsletter for Monday, March 15, 2010 - COMMENTARY – news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Election Law Ensures No Credibility

By HTET AUNG Monday, March 15, 2010 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=18043>

Set aside the issue of the Constitution and persuading the Burmese junta to hold a free and fair election and the opposition to participate in the process.

However limited, change will take place in the governmental process to a certain degree with the installation of parliament and other governmental bodies at the regional and state levels.

This is the political calculation of some Burmese politicians and intellectuals inside and outside the country who believe that the pragmatic reality is that the generals must be engaged through the procedures of governmental policy, if the country is to move forward.

They seem to expect that after creating the Constitution, the ruling generals would allow an open, fair electoral process, if the opposition would participate in the election.

However, now it's clear that the junta hasn't produced a level playing field and the electoral laws were established without any input outside the military government.

Chapter 1 of the Political Parties Registration Law titled “Name and Definition,” in Article 2/d reads: “A political party that believes in a genuine disciplined multi-party democratic system and which the Election Commission allows to be founded in accord with this law may conduct their activities based on a political ideology.”

According to the definition, no matter what kind of political ideology a political party has, it must be subject to “disciplined democracy,” which translates to the will of the military.

Though the pro-engagement camp expects change to come within the new institutional framework, the junta's political maneuver under the electoral law will allow it to build “a multi-party system under one political ideology—disciplined democracy,” which means an ideology that meets the undefined criteria of the military regime.

What is the difference between the junta's previous socialism system and its “disciplined democracy?” Under socialism, Burma practiced a one-party system with one political ideology. Now, the country will practice a multi-party system with one political ideology as interpreted by the regime.

Like it or not, the Burmese people are going to face an election this year. The duty of the Election Commission should be to plan, supervise and implement free and fair elections independently and impartially in order to support a peaceful transfer of power from the military government to the parliament.

However, Burma's Political Parties Registration Law sets restrictive, undemocratic criteria for the leadership and membership of a political party and gives the EC the power to disband any political party that fails to meet its criteria, a blunt interference in the internal affairs of political parties.

Article 4/e reads: “People who are serving a prison term cannot form a political party.” Article 10/e reads: “People who are serving a prison term cannot be a member of a political party.”

Those two rules exclude more than 2,000 political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, a key player in the democratic opposition, from politics.

In addition, Article 6 reads: “The application to found a political party in accord with Article 5 of this law must agree to the

following facts,” which include sub-clause 6/c: “to abide by the [2008] Constitution.”

Analysts say that in the application submitted to the Election Commission to form a political party, the party must agree to follow the Constitution, which is interpreted to mean that all candidates must refrain from discussing any proposed amendments to the Constitution during the election campaign. If parties or candidates discuss amending the Constitution during the campaign, they could be dissolved, say analysts.

However, analysts say that following the election, elected members of parliament would be able to propose Constitutional amendments by following the rules proscribed in the Constitution.

Although the junta issued the election law in accord with Article 443 of the Constitution, it ignored Article 441 and called for the parties to agree to follow a Constitution which has yet to be created.

Article 441 reads: “A nation-wide referendum held for adoption of this Constitution where more than half of the eligible voters voted, of which the majority of the voters adopted this Constitution, shall come into operation throughout the Union from the day the first session of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw [Parliament] is convened.”

The international community has expressed its concern that Burma's election laws fail to meet basic human rights standards.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reads: “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.”

Article 25 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states: “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity to vote and in genuine periodical elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guarantying the free expression of the will of the electors.”

Aung San Suu Kyi—a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and a symbol of democracy—is tirelessly advocating for the promotion of democracy through universal and equal suffrage for all citizens and the right to be elected through democratic elections.

But she has been barred from voting and participating in the election because she is a political prisoner of the junta.

Credibility and inclusiveness—two key benchmarks set by the international community—have both failed even before the election begins.

THE BURMANET NEWS - Wed, 17. Mar 2010 - March 17, 2010, Issue #3918 - Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The MIZZIMA- <<http://www.mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3678-no-change-in-burma-from-2010-nolls-dr-sein-win.html>>

No change in Burma from 2010 polls: Dr Sein Win

The Burmese junta is using the 2010 elections to smother the opposition and its democratic activities to cement and legitimize military rule in the guise of elections and democracy, said Dr Sein Win, Prime Minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma in exile.

“We will not accept it, and our struggle for democracy in Burma might be long,” he said.

Dr Sein Win said this at a function on March 13 at Berkeley, California in the United States, to mark Burma's Human Rights Day.

March 13 has been earmarked as Burma's Human Rights Day by activists when a Rangoon Institute of Technology student Phone Maw was brutally killed in 1988 by Burmese soldiers, which eventually led to a nationwide uprising against military rule.

“This year’s elections, in my opinion, will not usher in any change in Burma,” Dr Sein Win said. He added that all the democratic alliances believe the constitution will not lead to any kind of democracy.

Controversy has erupted between the regime and opposition political parties over the new electoral laws and the 2008 constitution. For instance, the President must be from a military background and a registered party has to support and defend the 2008 constitution.



Dr Sein Win

Nyunt Than, the President of the San Francisco-based NGO the

Burmese American Democratic Alliance, said the regime had now closed all doors to possible negotiation and the process of democratization.

“We Burmese people will never give up, even though it seems hopeless,” Nyunt Than said.

“Democracy icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2000 political prisoners are our role models, and the oppressive regime will be defeated,” he said.

Toe Lwin, a former political prisoner now living in the United States told Mizzima that the election laws were a clear example of lawlessness by the junta in ensuring that there was no effective opposition.

“The election laws are designed to simply crush opposition parties,” Toe Lwin said.

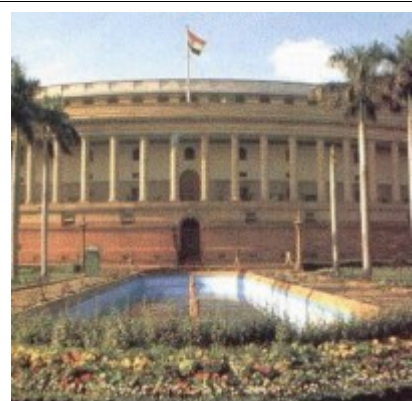
The 2008 constitution does not protect the rights of the people, and the vicious circle of arbitrary arrests and torture will continue, he said.

Chinland Guardian <chinland_guardian@yahoo.co.in> - [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] Indian MPs React to Burma's Electoral Laws Datum:Thu, 18. Mar 2010 05:28:26

Indian MPs React to Burma's Electoral Laws

Chiland Guardian.

<<http://chinlandguardian.com/news-2009/922-indian-mps-react-to-burmas-electoral-laws.html>>



The Houses of Indian Parliament

18 March 2010: In a continuing chain of world reactions to the new Burmese election laws, Indian Parliamentarians yesterday expressed disappointment over the lack of inclusiveness and credibility of the junta's planned elections this year.

The Indian Parliamentarian's Forum for Democracy in Burma (IPFDB), said in a statement issued yesterday, that the electoral laws enacted by the military junta earlier this month fall short of minimum democratic standards. The group cites specific provisions in the election laws, which place unfair onus on opposition political parties such as the National League for Democracy to drastically transform themselves or risk being ineligible as contestants, as being fundamentally undemocratic.

“We have expressed our disapproval of the constitution of 2008 in Burma because the genuine peoples' representatives were not allowed to contribute in the drafting process and the referendum was a sham,” the IPFDB said in a statement.

Parliamentarians from the world's largest democracy said that the elections will not bring about democratic change in Burma, but instead will prolong the problems in their biggest mainland Southeast Asian neighbor to the east.

The Indian government, which has over the years been forging bilateral ties with Burma's military junta, however, has so far maintained its silence on the new junta-promulgated elections laws.

“We are worried of continued instabilities in our neighboring countries,” the Parliamentarians said.

An all-party Parliamentarian group on Burma said that the junta must, before its planned elections, release prisoners of conscience, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the true democratic leader, and begin dialogue with her and the legitimate representatives of the ethnic groups so that genuine national reconciliation can take place in Burma.

The IPFDB was founded in 2005 and consists of MPs from across party lines and from both Houses of the Parliament.

Chiland Guardian.

The Irrawaddy – News letter for Wednesday, March 17, 2010, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

Asean Must Speak with One Voice on Burma's Election

By AUNG ZAW COMMENTARY <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=18060>

The Burmese regime announced its anticipated election laws last week and will definitely hold its promised election this year.

The election laws confirmed fears that that the election won't be free, fair and inclusive, meaning that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) will have more trouble with its miscreant member, military-ruled Burma.

Although Asean withheld comment on Burma's election laws, some member countries have expressed uneasiness.

In Singapore, while government officials remained silent, The Straits Times newspaper took a critical stance, saying: “One of the election laws seems aimed specifically at opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. It requires her party, the

National League for Democracy (NLD), to expel her as she is serving a suspended sentence under house arrest. Without her participation, the vote cannot have much credibility.”

The island state's daily said Suu Kyi remains a symbol of resistance and “a political force whose exclusion cannot be justified.”

It continued: “Neither can elections be seen as inclusive if the other 2,000 political prisoners are unable to contest the polls. With her and them off the ballot, voters' choice will be drastically limited, if not largely predetermined. An election commission will have 'final and conclusive' say on all electoral matters, according to the authorities, but its five members have to be approved by the junta. So much for fairness and transparency.”

Alberto Romulo, foreign secretary of the Philippines, went further and commented: “Unless they release Suu Kyi and allow her and her party to participate in the elections, it's a complete farce and therefore contrary to their road map to democracy.”

Romulo had already, before the announcement of the election laws, called on the junta to ensure that the election is “free, fair, credible and all-inclusive.”

Teuku Faizasyah, a spokesman of Indonesia's foreign ministry, predicted that the laws may undermine the election because its result will not be inclusive.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is scheduled to send his foreign minister, Marty Natalegawa, this month to Burma, where he is expected to speak out for democratic reform there, including an inclusive election.

The election in Burma will again test Asean's waning influence and the controversial policy of “constructive engagement” in its dealings with Burma.

Senior officials from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have also told the Burmese regime that the release of Suu Kyi and other political prisoners is key to winning international credibility and to achieving much-needed national reconciliation. However, there has been no sign that the regime is prepared to heed their advice.

In February, Surin Pitsuwan, Asean's secretary-general and former foreign minister of Thailand, told the BBC's “Hardtalk” program that Asean expected a credible and transparent election in Burma, but added that the organization cannot interfere in the details of the poll.

Without mentioning Burma's dire political situation, the prevailing climate of fear and the country's 2,000 political prisoners, Surin Pitsuwan spoke as if he were a spokesman of the regime.

“No election is perfect,” he said. “It has to begin. That's why they [the Burmese regime] are beginning. They promise [to hold an election] at the end of this year.” And he said the Burmese generals' commitment to the election should be seen as a positive factor.

In the past, Asean support for the Burmese regime was tied to a belief that engagement will change its repressive behavior and bring more openness. Asean leaders also insisted that the organization has to counter China's sphere of influence in Burma.

So far, however, Asean's engagement policy has proven to be ineffective.

Since Burma became a member of Asean in 1997, the regime has incarcerated ever more political prisoners, driven hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority refugees to seek safety in jungle hideouts, in neighboring Thailand and, recently, even in China. It brazenly massacred activists and monks in full view of the world in the September 2007 demonstrations. Today, Burma is a satellite state of China.

More worryingly, Burma has forged closer military ties with North Korea. Reports of purchases of short-range ballistic missiles have been confirmed and there have been persistent reports of nuclear cooperation between the two nations.

Senior US State Department officials have publicly expressed concern about the shady relationship between Burma and North Korea.

So, where does Asean stand now? Unfortunately, not all in the bloc agree that it is important for Burma to move toward a genuine democracy rather than “disciplinary democracy.”

Not surprisingly, the governments that have been most silent on the need for a free and fair election—Laos, Cambodia, Brunei and Vietnam—are the ones that share the Burmese junta's penchant for authoritarian rule.

Vietnam, currently chair of Asean, is particularly shaping up as a bulwark against pressure from within Asean and from

the outside world.

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry has said on its Web site that Hanoi supports Burma's regional and international integration. As a member of the UN Security Council in 2008-09, Vietnam maintained that engagement with Naypyidaw should be based on a policy of non-interference in Burma's domestic affairs.

In recent months, Burmese and Vietnamese leaders and senior officials have met repeatedly to strengthen bilateral and regional ties.

Last October, Gen Shwe Mann, the joint chief of staff of the Burmese armed forces, traveled to Hanoi to meet with Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet and sign an agreement on increasing military cooperation.

Two months later, Maung Myint, Burma's minister for religious affairs, also visited Vietnam, where he signed the first bilateral agreement ever reached between Asean members on religious matters.

The visit was followed in January by a meeting between Burmese Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein and Vietnam's deputy ministers of foreign affairs and defense in Naypyidaw. Then, later in the month, Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win attended a ministerial meeting of the Asean Political Security Community, which Vietnam hosted as the Asean chair for 2010.

In view of these developments, there can be no doubt that the Burmese regime leaders are counting on Vietnam.

There is nothing especially untoward in any of this, but as long as Asean remains divided along political lines, there is a very real danger of its less democratic members reinforcing the Burmese junta's stubborn refusal to acknowledge the need for change.

Asean should tell the regime leaders unequivocally that the organization is in favor of a genuinely democratic election and that the bloc cannot be seen as defending the right of dictators to rule as they please.

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

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DVB

Suu Kyi urges 'unification' with army

By AHUNT PHONE MYAT - <<http://www.dvb.no/news/suu-kyi-urges-%E2%80%98unification%E2%80%99-with-army/>>

Published: **29 March 2010**

The detained leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party has said that civilians and soldiers in Burma should unite in order to develop the country.

Her statement was read out by NLD spokesperson Ohn Kyaing as the party on 27 March marked the 65th annual Armed Forces Day (or Resistance Day), which commemorates the start of the Burmese army's resistance to Japanese occupation in 1945.

Around 1000 NLD members from across the country attended the event, along with foreign diplomats from countries such as Britain, Australia and the US.

"At this time, some people are saying things to create disunity among us and the Tatmadaw [army]," Suu Kyi was quoted as saying. "They are saying things that give the impression that the NLD doesn't want the prosperity of the nation or the Tatmadaw."

"But in reality, we wish to see Burma and the Tatmadaw standing with dignity and honour. For this, I would like to request the people of Burma and the Tatmadawmen [army personnel] to be united and endeavour to develop a democratic nation."

Burma has since 1962 been ruled by a military government that has aggressively expanded the size of the army, now thought to be up to 500,000-strong.

But the head of the junta, Than Shwe, said in a speech on Saturday in the new capital, Naypyidaw, that the country had been forced to assimilate the military and the government.



Soldiers parade in Naypyidaw on Resistance Day (Reuters)

"The leaders of the Armed Forces turned from politicians into patriotic Tatmadawmen when armed struggle for independence was necessary, and they turned back into politicians...when the time came for political struggle," he said.

He also warned parties looking to contest the elections this year to "show restraint at a time when the democratisation process has yet to reach maturity".

"Great vigilance is necessary against unrest in the country, against election violence that jeopardizes rule of law, stability and tranquility and against circumstances leading to the disintegration of the Union."

A letter sent on Saturday to Than Shwe by veteran opposition politicians requested that he revise the controversial 2008 constitution and strict election laws that bar Suu Kyi from running for office.

Additional reporting by Thurein Soe

ThaungN@aol.com - Mon, 29. Mar 2010 17:51:02-Burmese opposition fails to register for election

guardian.co.uk - World news Web

Burma's National League for Democracy fails to register for election - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/29/burma-opposition-polls>

Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition refuses to take first legal step on path to contesting promised national poll



Aung San Suu Kyi was quoted last week by her lawyer as saying she opposed registering her party because the junta's restrictions on the vote were "unjust". Photograph: Hla Hla Htay/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press in Rangoon
guardian.co.uk, Monday 29 March
2010 12.19 BST

The main Burmese opposition party has decided not to register, meaning it will be unable to contest the country's first election in two decades, it was reported today.

Hla Thein, a delegate at today's meeting of the National League for Democracy, said its members had decided against registration.

Registration would have been the first legal step needed to take part in the polls, which the country's ruling junta has promised to hold this year. No date has been set.

The detained National League for Democracy leader, [Aung San Suu Kyi](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/29/burma-opposition-polls), was quoted last week by her lawyer as saying she opposed registering her party because the junta's restrictions on the vote were "unjust". She stressed that she would let party members decide.

Ten Years On

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by **Moe Aye**

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