

# Junta law bars Suu Kyi from election

## NLD may be forced to expel democracy icon

**RANGOON:** Burma's junta has barred Aung San Suu Kyi from running in upcoming elections and may force her own political party to expel her under a new election law unveiled yesterday.

The Political Parties Registration Law, published in official newspapers, prohibits anyone convicted by a court of law from joining a political party, making them ineligible to become a candidate.

It also instructs parties to expel members who are "not in conformity with the qualification to be members of a party", a clause that could force Mrs Suu Kyi's expulsion. Parties that don't register automatically cease to exist.

Mrs Suu Kyi 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 Mrs Suu Kyi locked up during the election campaign.

Last month, the Supreme Court dismissed her latest appeal for freedom.

The new election law was immediately criticised by Mrs Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party and by the United States and Britain.

NLD Deputy Chairman Tin Oo called the law unfair, politically motivated and designed to restrict activities of the party, which has already been battered by arrests and harassment.

"The fact party registration will be allowed only after expulsion of a convicted member is too much. This is politically motivated" toward Mrs Suu Kyi, he said. The junta enacted five election-related laws on Monday, two of which have now been made public. Three more are to be unveiled in coming days.

US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said Mrs Suu Kyi should be released from house arrest so she can "play an active role in the political life of the country going forward".

"We've seen the first of five [laws]. I think it would be fair to say that what we've seen so far is disappointing and regrettable," Mr Campbell said during a visit to Malaysia.

The registration law says existing political parties have 60 days from Monday to register with an Election Committee whose members are to be appointed by the junta. The government currently recognises 10 parties.

The law also bars members of religious orders and civil servants from joining political parties. The date of the elections has not been announced, and the NLD has not said whether it will contest the balloting. The government announced in 2008 that elections will take place



Aung San Suu Kyi last November. AP

sometime this year. The NLD says the 2008 constitution is unfair and gives the junta controlling say in government. Mrs Suu Kyi's lawyer and a senior party member, Nyan Win, said the new law also bars people who have lodged an appeal against a conviction, which he said "clearly refers" to Mrs Suu Kyi.

"It is very unfair that a party member serving a prison term for his or her political convictions has to be expelled from the party. This clause amounts to interfering in party internal affairs," said Aung



Tin Oo, right, deputy leader of the National League for Democracy, talks to journalists at the party's headquarters yesterday in Rangoon. AP

Thein, a lawyer who has defended activists. He said the provision would exclude many individuals who have been imprisoned for their beliefs. Human rights groups say the junta has jailed about 2,100 political prisoners.

"We're going to study the election laws once they've all been released," British Ambassador Andrew Heyn said. "But it's regrettable and disappointing the laws are not based on a dialogue with a range of political opinion." AP