

The junta is delaying announcement of the election law to handicap opposition parties and give more time to pro-junta parties

The detained Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has not yet decided whether to participate in the upcoming elections, her lawyer Nyan Win said.

According to Nyan Win, Suu Kyi said, “this is not the time to make the decision,” and that the elections would be lacking in substance without freedom of information and expression.

On Tuesday, Suu Kyi met with her lawyer at her house and discussed National League for Democracy (NLD) party issues and her house repairs. Suu Kyi represents the NLD, which is the main opposition party in Burma.

“I think Aung San Suu Kyi stated conditions for participation in the elections,” said Win Tin, one of the leaders of the NLD.

NLD party offices in several townships have still not been allowed to reopen, making it difficult for party members to communicate with each other, Win Tin said. He also pointed to the lack of press freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of association, which observers describe as critical prior to an election which is to be free and fair.

Suu Kyi has been detained for 15 of the past 20 years. Several foreign leaders have called for the release of Suu Kyi ahead of the polls, saying that the election would not be free and fair without her release.

Although the Burmese military regime has announced that it will hold the election this year, many political groups face uncertainty about the election since the election law has not yet been announced.

Analysts say that the delay in promulgating the election law makes it possible for the regime to continue tight restrictions on activities by political parties while allowing members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a junta-backed organization, to run

pre-election campaigns in parts of the country.

Meanwhile, a rumor in Rangoon suggests that the regime will form a caretaker government headed by Lt-Gen Myint Swe, the commander of the Bureau of Special Operations 5, in April.

Myint Swe is reputed to be junta-chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe's protege. As the military commander in Rangoon, he played a key role in the ruthless crackdown and handling of monk-led demonstrations in September 2007.

According to sources in the Burmese military, Than Shwe will announce the election timetable and law by the end of February. Sources say that the army is recruiting candidates from outside its own ranks to compete in military-backed parties during the election, targeting businesspeople and community figures such as teachers in townships and villages across the country.