

Some members of the National League for Democracy want to re-register as a party to contest this year's election, but others remain opposed. Burma's main opposition party, faced with a choice of registering for this year's election without its leader Aung San Suu Kyi or disbanding, is showing signs of internal division, according to senior party members.



Party sources said that Aung Shwe, the 92-year-old chairman of the National League for Democracy (NLD), told members of the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) on Monday that he supported party re-registration—a move that would involve expelling Suu Kyi because of electoral laws banning parties with members currently in detention.

“U Aung Shwe wants to register and join the election to avoid the dissolution of the party, and many other party officials echoed his opinion,” said a party source.

Suu Kyi, who was sentenced to house arrest last August under charges widely dismissed as a ploy to prevent her from participating in this year's election, said that she would “respect the decision of the party,” said her lawyer Nyan Win, who is also a senior party official.

On March 29, more than 90 recently elected Central Committee members from across the country are expected to meet with the 20-member CEC to decide on whether to re-register. If the party fails to register within 60 days of an election law announced on March 8, it will cease to exist as a legal entity.

Speaking with *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, NLD Vice-Chairman Tin Oo said that he would accept the majority decision of the party. But, he added, “a dignified party would not accept the laws that marginalize detained democracy leaders” like Suu Kyi and Min Ko Naing.



Although it appears that many party members are in favor of registration, some senior leaders have been outspoken in their opposition. A party source described Central Executive Committee members Win Tin, Nyan Win, Ohn Kyaing and Han Thar Myint as being “in the opposing camp.”

Win Tin, a longtime supporter of Suu Kyi who was released in September 2008 after serving more than 19 years in prison, said he would probably retire from the party if the majority of its officials decide to register.

“I think many people will choose to register,” he said. “If that happens, I don't think I will continue to be a party member. I don't wish to follow the path the military foisted on us by force. I will retire because my health is also failing.”

One of the leading party officials who support registration and joining the election is 67-year-old

Khin Maung Swe, a former geologist.

“Our line is to try to maintain the existence of the party,” he said. “Joining in the election is not surrendering to the regime. We are determined to persistently strive for changes in the Constitution.”

Asked why Suu Kyi did not clearly state whether the party should register or join the election, Win Tin said: “Daw Suu is a pro-democracy leader, not a dictator, so she let the party make the decision.”