

State-run newspapers in Burma accused critics of the country's new election laws of showing bias.

RANGOON—State-run newspapers in Burma accused critics of the country's new election laws of showing their bias by denouncing one or two aspects of the legislation and ignoring their intent to restore democracy.

The commentary also defended the laws against criticism that they targeted detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is ineligible to run for office under the election rules.

The ruling junta earlier this month enacted five laws that set out the rules for elections expected later this year. No exact date has been set for the polls, which would be the first since 1990. The last election was won by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, but the military refused to hand over power.

"Every person who wishes to carry out the democratization process peacefully and in accord with the Constitution sees enactment of the laws as a significant development," said a commentary in the state-run *Myanma Ahlin* newspaper and its sister publications.

But those who disagree with the military government's "Road Map to Democracy" expressed their disagreement even before the five laws were published, it said.

Calling the laws unacceptable based on disagreeing with one or two articles without even reading the whole thing is an act of bias, showing intention to oppose everything, it said. The newspapers closely reflect official opinion.

The new party registration law, announced last week, prohibits anyone convicted of a crime from being a member of a political party and also makes them ineligible to be a candidate in the elections.

That makes Suu Kyi ineligible, because she was convicted last year on charges of violating her

house arrest when an American man swam uninvited to her lakeside property. She has spent 14 of the past 20 years in detention, and is currently serving an 18-month term of house arrest.

The newspaper commentary denied the law was aimed at anyone in particular.

"Some say the law is designed to ban a certain person from standing for election," the commentary said. "If it is intended for the said person, an article would have been referred to a specific crime so that the person will be banned from the election forever."

Any convicted criminals are free to join political parties when they are released, unlike Burma's first constitution that barred convicted persons from being members of parliament within five years of their release, it said.

The article also defended provisions—higher fees and membership minimums—that would make it more difficult for political parties to register. It recalled that in 1990, 235 parties registered but only 90 took part in the election. The others had to be abolished as they committed illegal acts and malpractice, it said.

"Now is the time when we have to start to shape [the] democratic system. So, quality is more important than quantity," the commentary said.