

The Burmese regime's censorship board is forcing newspapers and other media to publish the official line on the NLD decision not to contest the election.

Outside Burma the reactions of the press and observers to the National League for Democracy's (NLD's) decision not to contest this year's election have been numerous and varied, but inside Burma the military government's Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) is forcing newspapers and other publications to publish the official line on the NLD decision, if they publish at all.

To date, Burma's state-run newspapers have been silent about the NLD's decision.

After submitting articles to the censorship board for verification, journals *Myanmar Newsweek* and *The Yangon Times* on Tuesday were forced by the PSRD to report that the NLD's decision will disrupt the election, according to media sources in Rangoon.

*Myanmar Newsweek* wrote: "The NLD's decision not to participate in the planned election damages the peaceful transition to democracy for the country and its citizens."

In Burma, every publication is required to verify its articles through the PSRD before publication.

One Rangoon-based editor told *The Irrawaddy*: "For our journal, if we want to publish the NLD decision, I think the censorship board will only give us permission if we write what they want."

The NLD executive committee decided unanimously on Monday not to register the party for the election. The election laws promulgated by the regime state that any party that fails to register by a deadline in early May will cease to exist legally.

The NLD executive committee's decision not to register was prompted by the election laws, which members described as "unjust" and unlikely to result in a fair and inclusive election.

The laws excluded anyone serving a criminal sentence from participating in the election—a provision that bars NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. In order to participate in the election, the NLD would have had to expel Suu Kyi from the party.

In contrast to the muted reaction inside Burma, observers and publications outside the country have lined up to deliver their opinions on the NLD decision and its consequences.

"If the NLD fails to register, Burma's regime will do as they did at the 1993 National Convention. They will say it is not our fault the NLD did not participate in the elections and become part of the new government. That it was the NLD's own decision," said Win Min, a Burma analyst based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Aung Naing Oo, a Burmese political commentator living in exile, told *The Irrawaddy* that the NLD decision stemmed from the unjust 2008 Constitution and the unjust election laws. "The

NLD has to confront these unjust laws,” Aung Naing Oo said. “So the question arises how they will confront them: within the law or outside the law. The party cannot legally stand without registration, so they have to confront the unjust laws outside the law.”

Aung Naing Oo said the NLD's next step is “delicate and important.”

Other observers say that the future response of the Burmese military junta depends on the next steps of the NLD.

“The situation is now in the military junta's hands and they can do what they want,” said Chan Htun, a veteran Rangoon politician, pointing out that if NLD members continue to deliver speeches urging a boycott of the election, they could be arrested.

“The parties that boycott [the election] will be outlawed,” said Debbie Stothard, the coordinator of the Alternative Asean Network on Burma. “And we have to understand that in the past when people were members of a so-called outlaw organization, they were sent to jail. So this is a very big threat.”

Stothard used a football analogy to describe the environment established by the regime's election laws, saying that the Burmese military government has organized a game where only one team is allowed to play and there is only one goal post.