

The NLD must reorganize itself along new lines and bring in new, innovative, energetic leaders and members.

Many stakeholders in Burmese politics have been crossing their fingers about what the National League for Democracy (NLD) will say about the upcoming election. Or more precisely, what Aung San Suu Kyi will say about the long-awaited election which will decide the fate of 52 million people for better or worse.

Although there has been a big effort to update Suu Kyi's understanding of the status of the NLD and the domestic and international political climate, she unfortunately still has very limited information to gauge the opinion of her own people and the outside world.

Her wisdom and wits are undoubtedly intact. However, the consequences of her decision to take part in the election or to step aside will have profound consequences, no matter her choice.

On the other hand, Snr-Gen Than Shwe is himself making decisions on the basis of misinformation and bias based on the information he gets from his military advisers.

It is not a comforting idea that the fate of the country partly hinges on a dialogue between these two individuals.

In 2009, the NLD tried to free itself from the consequences of the 1990 election with its Shwegondaing declaration. But Than Shwe ignored all its demands at a recent cabinet meeting, and the NLD is now boxed in again and isolated from real engagement with the regime.

Different ethnic minorities, fighting for quasi-autonomy, are still in the jungles trying to figure out how to avoid becoming the junta's border guards. Ultimately, what they seek is a federal system of government.

Than Shwe has missed his chance to be seen as the leader who brought democracy to Burma through political compromise. Instead, he's bent on consolidating his regime, thus placing the entire country at risk.

If the NLD ultimately goes along with the “seven steps” road map and the 2008 Constitution, there is no hope for the betterment of the country. If they opt out of the election, there will be growing uncertainty about the country’s future and the NLD will be left with a negative image.

Aung San Suu Kyi tried to form the party with intellectuals in 1988. Unfortunately, she had to be content with a group of journalists and lawyers who had been molded under the Socialist regime for many years. They chose the wrong path and the NLD has been crushed, squashed and dismembered ever since.

If the NLD realigned itself with real intellectuals, there's still some hope that it could find a way to succeed. Otherwise, there will probably be a lack of unity and the votes of the people who admire Suu Kyi and who hate the generals will be scattered about, and less effective.

The recent NLD reform was merely an expansion of the Central Executive Committee to save the octogenarians from disgrace. It was not done to save the country.

It is time for the NLD to lay down a clear strategy which the regime could respond to. Producing only demands without a tangible strategy just antagonizes the junta and reinforces its mind-numbing stubbornness.

The NLD should learn some lessons from Vietnam's post-war experiences.

When the Vietnam War ended, North and South Vietnam reunited and a new government was formed with the leading Communists. All executives were handpicked from the comrades in the revolution, but these leaders were not equipped to govern and as a result, organizations became corrupt and inefficient.

The Communist Party realized it within five years and replaced them with efficient officers and technocrats from the previous South Vietnamese regime.

While the regime and the NLD continue at loggerheads over the formation of a government, after the election, administrative and legislative duties should be in the hands of experienced executives and technocrat MPs, who should be the engineers, economists, educators, company's executives (doctors, lawyers and journalists are already saturated in the NLD) and agronomists.

Such people are potential "transformers" who could guide the country into prosperity during a transitional period. At the same time, they could work for the interest of the people and meet the different challenges from the ethnic minorities.

These type of technocrats and scholars have watched the political developments since 1988. Shifting the balance of power in favor of a new generation of leaders would surely pay dividends in the reconstruction of the country because they are the ones who have the acute appreciation of the plight of the people. They know how to utilize votes to bring peace, prosperity and a decent government to the country.

A so-called third force is also at work in its own way, while staying out of the public eye. Their real identity is cloaked in many ways, but they are the beneficiaries of the current regime. They also lack the ability to offer a clear strategy and position to become a political force that most Burmese voters can rely.

Meanwhile, the NLD should abandon its idea of claiming legitimate power based on the results of the 1990 election. It is high time to put the party machine into top gear, in the manner of a well-organized, disciplined democratic party and unite the party countrywide.

Even if the NLD decides to run, the Constitution and the rigged elections could favor the NLD not to win a majority of seats in Parliament. Also, there may not be enough time for the NLD to campaign in 300-plus townships. But in many townships, NLD offices are ready to open now. The NLD could play the role of watchdog, and also back the technocrat candidates in constituencies where the NLD doesn't contest.

Whether or not the NLD runs and wins some seats in parliament, a new breed of technocrats

and intellectuals could gain a leading role in parliament and lay the ground work for a future democratic government.

A deal should also be made with the ethnic minorities that a federal state will be guaranteed if they vote for the people who really represent them. To do that, the NLD must support some form of federalism.

Eventually, the NLD must reorganize itself along new lines and bring in new, innovative, energetic leaders and members.

Until these strategies are laid down, there is no reason for the junta to talk to the NLD. If not, it will have little role in the immediate future, and its only hope will be to re-emerge after the dust settles.

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