

A new party formed by renegade members of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's disbanded party has received a permit to participate in Burma's first elections in two decades, state media reports.

RANGOON — A new party formed by renegade members of detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's disbanded party has received a permit to participate in Burma's first elections in two decades, state media reported Saturday.

The National Democratic Force will join 37 other new political parties and five existing groups in contesting the elections later this year, the state-run *Myanma Ahlin* newspaper reported.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won Burma's last elections in 1990 by a landslide, but the military government has refused to hand over power.

The junta has been under heavy international pressure to introduce democratic reforms and has announced new elections will be held later this year on a still-unspecified date.

Critics dismiss the elections as a sham designed to cement nearly 50 years of military rule.

New election laws prevent Suu Kyi and other political prisoners from participating in the polls, and her party decided to boycott the balloting. It was automatically disbanded for failing to register for the polls by a May 6 deadline as a result. There is no registration deadline for new political parties.

Suu Kyi has expressed dissatisfaction through her lawyer over the formation of the new breakaway party, led by Khin Maung Swe.

Members of her disbanded party have accused the National Democratic Force of stealing their party symbol, a bamboo hat, in order to win votes.

Khin Maung Swe said the NDF's symbol is not the same because it has two stars above the hat. He said the party will continue the "struggle for democracy," but gave no further policy details.

A separate party named the Democratic Party (Myanmar) also opened its headquarters Friday. It was founded by the daughters of former politicians from the parliamentary period between independence in 1948 and 1962, when the military seized power.

They include Than Than Nu whose father, U Nu, was Burma's last elected prime minister.