

Burmese military chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe has a number of plans under his sleeve to ensure his continued hold on power following the planned election this year, according to a former senior intelligence officer in Burma's Ministry of Defense.



Reclusive Than Shwe is totally unprepared to give up his military leadership role at least within the next three or four years, said Aung Lynn Htut, a former intelligence officer for the Burmese army who is now living in the United States.

Based on his military sources in Naypidaw, Burma's capital, he has outlined three possible plans that Than Shwe could pursue.

He said Than Shwe's Plan A is to become a leader like China's late premier Deng Xiaoping or Iran's former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini in the event of a landslide victory by the regime-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

"Plan B is if the regime-backed party does not win an outright victory. Than Shwe will form a special military commission like in China or North Korea, holding the reins from behind the scenes as the top leader of the commission," he said. "I think both Gen Than Shwe and No.2 Gen Maung Aye will continue to hold their military posts after the election."

According to Burma's 2008 Constitution, the army commander-in-chief will be the most powerful figure in the country, able to appoint key ministers and assume power "in times of emergency." It also gives the military a quarter of the seats in parliament and hence a veto over decisions made by legislators.

"Than Shwe has ordered his subordinates to study the role of military commission in China, Iran, North Korea and also the function of border guard forces in Bangladesh," Aung Lynn Htut said.

He said that two unexpected events came as surprises to Than Shwe this year: the NLD boycott against the elections, which has damaged the credibility of the election; and the strong opposition of ethnic armed cease-fire groups against joining the government's border guard

force plan.

Since April 2009, Naypyidaw has tried to coerce all ethnic armed groups to transform their armies into a border guard force under the regime's command. So far, only the New Democratic Army—Kachin and one Kareni group have indicated they would comply with the order.

Other groups including the large United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) have said they would not comply, or are in negotiations with the regime.

“Because of these surprises, I heard Than Shwe is in a bit of confusion over the election,” said the ex-officer said. “But election or not, I would say that Aung San Suu Kyi who is going to be freed in November remains Than Shwe's greatest headache.”

Than Shwe and former intelligence chief Gen Khin Nyunt, who Aung Lynn Htut once reported to, were the two key players in deciding against the army's transfer of power to Suu Kyi's political party, which won a landslide victory in Burma's last election in 1990.

“Not unwillingly, Than Shwe seized power from the then army chief Saw Maung in 1992 and decided not to transfer power to Suu Kyi. Not that he was just obliged to play that role. He seized the opportunity,” Aung Lynn Htut said.

Than Shwe will not take any chances that the 2010 election will produce the results of the 1990 elections, but if something goes wrong, he would order the army to launch another coup d'etat according to his Plan C and be assured of his status quo, Aung Lynn Htut said.