



RANGOON — Burma's state-run press on Wednesday warned "subversives" that anyone who disrupts the country's first elections in two decades could face up to 20 years in prison.

Ahead of the polls, the ruling military junta has passed numerous laws and rules criticized by detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the international community as undemocratic and unfair.

The new laws effectively bar Suu Kyi and other political prisoners—estimated at more than 2,000—from taking part in the elections. Tight rules for campaigning bar parties from chanting, marching or saying anything at rallies that could tarnish the country's image. Critics have called the elections a sham designed to cement 50 years of military rule.

A commentary in *The New Light of Myanmar* newspaper, published as a series Tuesday and Wednesday, said the government is working to ensure stable, peaceful and successful polls and that such laws are necessary because "there may be acts by subversives to disrupt elections."

The article's author was identified only as "A Law Analyst." Commentaries in Burma's tightly controlled newspapers are viewed as reflections of the junta's views.

Suu Kyi's opposition party, the National League for Democracy, decided to boycott the balloting and has been disbanded. Activists inside and outside the country have launched a quiet "no vote" campaign, with pamphlets distributed anonymously with that slogan.

The commentary noted that according to the new election laws, electoral crimes are punishable by a year in prison and a fine, and that a harsh 1996 "Law Protecting the Peaceful and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility" is still in force.

The law provides for five to 20 years in prison for anyone who "incites, delivers speech or makes oral or written statements that undermine the stability of the state, community peace and tranquility and prevalence of law and order." Any organization that violates the law can be suspended.

Renegade members of Suu Kyi's disbanded party have formed a new group, the National Democratic Force, to carry the party's mantle in the vote. Suu Kyi has expressed dissatisfaction through her lawyer with the formation of the new breakaway party.

Suu Kyi's party won a landslide majority in the 1990 election, the result of which was not honored by the junta.