

Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi gives junta leader Than Shwe a smart sidekick in response to his election plans.

Snr Gen Than Shwe is known to be fan of Chinese *Sholin* martial art movies. Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, on the other hand, reads books on philosophy and works of world literature—but she has just delivered the junta leader a sidekick worthy of a *kung fu* master.

According to her lawyer Nyan Win, “Suu Kyi would not even think of registering under these unjust [election] laws.” This probably means that leaders of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy [NLD], will decide not to contest the planned general election.

Earlier, Suu Kyi expressed her unhappiness with the election laws, saying they are unfair because they excluded her and other political prisoners. According to Nyan Win, “She said she did not think the regime would release such a terrible law.”

Indeed, the election (or “the only game in town”) is in jeopardy as Suu Kyi's powerful message will influence many faithful members in her party and beyond. Many ordinary Burmese who despise the generals and have little faith in the coming election and the repressive election laws are likely to support Suu Kyi's stance.

Her message indicates that Suu Kyi wants to make her stance vis-a-vis the election laws and the planned election crystal clear to regional governments and the international community. ??

Suu Kyi knows well that the member governments of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are divided on the issue. The foreign minister of Indonesia is to visit Burma shortly to discuss the election laws with the regime.

Suu Kyi is also aware that the US administration and other western governments are closely watching developments within Burma and are keen to know the intentions of Suu Kyi and her NLD.

On the domestic front, Suu Kyi's message was aimed in two directions. One target was those NLD leaders who want the party to contest the election; the other was her captors.

The NLD itself faces a split and could divide into two main groups—pro-election and anti-election. Party chairman Aung Shwe and Dr Than Nyein are known to favor participation in the election. Deputy chairman Tin Oo and Win Tin head a number of NLD leaders who oppose the unjust election laws and participation in the election.

Nyan Win, told *The Irrawaddy* that his client had been considering her political future and strategy and had been following the international dimension of what was occurring in Burma.

So what is the NLD's future if the party refuses to register for the election? Will the regime outlaw the party or clamp down on its members? If it does so, will the NLD become an underground party?

The NLD has never been able to function as a legal opposition party in the past and Suu Kyi and like-minded party leaders who wanted to oppose the unjust election laws will have a new strategy to keep the party and movement together.

Burma watchers say the NLD could become a kind of social movement rather than a legal political party. This week, Suu Kyi reportedly told her lawyers that that if the imprisoned former student leader Min Ko Naing could fight for democracy in Burma without a political “signpost” she could do the same.

Charismatic Min Ko Naing and several student activists of the “88 Generation Students” group were arrested in 2007 and sentenced to long prison terms.

Knowing full well that the regime leaders will prevent her anyway from taking part in politics in Burma, the Nobel Peace Laureate replied by snubbing the election and election laws.

Perhaps Than Shwe's next step is to drive divisions deeper within the NLD and welcome disgruntled defectors to take part in the election.

But what about Suu Kyi, hardcore members of her party and her other supporters? The strife will undoubtedly continue. It could indeed prove endless—and endlessly confrontational.

Aung Zaw is founder and editor of the Irrawaddy magazine. He can be reached at aungzaw@irrawaddy.org