



If the political opposition is widely involved in the election, Burma will begin an irreversible transition away from authoritarianism.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) will decide to contest the 2010 election, despite its current demands for a constitutional review and other preconditions to be met before it participates. The run-up to the election will be similar to 1990: house arrests, detentions and restrictions. However, the NLD's pragmatic decision to participate will provide legitimacy to the much criticized process, offer voters a greater choice and prevent a political vacuum in the opposition movement.

The NLD should be prepared to work with younger military officers within the constitutional framework toward shared goals of reconciliation, nation building and development.

Sadly, Burma's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi will remain under house arrest. She has adopted a more flexible position toward sanctions, however, most importantly, she should signal her commitment to a long-term pact between the civilian and military leadership.

New ethnic political actors will enter the election. However, the regime's demand that armed ethnic groups disarm will remain contentious, potentially triggering renewed hostilities. All sides

should stick to diplomacy. The Burmese military should adopt more comprehensive, participatory approaches to reintegrate armed ethnic groups.

Unity among various opposition groups will remain elusive, while their international campaigns for ideal conditions in the election will undermine democrats within Burma who see the election as an opportunity for change. Hardliners within the armed forces, determined to defend their vested interests, will remain a formidable challenge both for the new generation of military officers and democratic actors who might potentially be willing to compromise for a common future in the new Constitutional context.

To achieve national reconciliation, the military will have to find ways to recognise the results of the 1990 election so that the process can move forward, and even then, attitudes toward the election will remain politically divided. But no matter how flawed the process, the election can bring about some liberalization.

If the NLD and other opposition figures are involved, though it may take at least a decade, Burma will move toward an irreversible transition away from military authoritarianism. Two factors will be critical: the capacity of the new Parliament members to build a coalition of the willing around a vision of rebuilding the country, and bottom-up civil society development as a vehicle for social change. If the 2010 election process can be considered a necessary step for national reconciliation, there is a good chance of democratization in Burma.

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