

The fact that Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy was disbanded by Burma's ruling junta wasn't unexpected news. The government's Election Commission announcement on Tuesday is just a legal phase of the annihilation that the regime began plotting years ago.

The NLD registered as a political party on Sept. 27, 1988, nine days after the military government, then known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, staged a bloody coup following the '88 nationwide uprising. This month, 22 years later, the most popular party and the winner of the 1990 election was disbanded. Along with it, nine other parties, including ethnic parties, were dissolved.

Yes, the party is now illegal. That means, any individual members of the party will be more vulnerable than before when it comes to exercising political or social activities. Thus, the freedom of the party's leading members such as Vice Chairman Tin Oo, 83; veteran journalist-turned politician Win Tin, 81; Suu Kyi's spokesperson, Nyan Win, as well as other party members is at stake. They are all still strong critics of the government's upcoming election and have campaigned not to vote in the election as it would not be free and fair.

Increased harassment or arrest of active members of the party is highly likely in the next phase of the regime's plan to destroy the party completely. Although the party decided in March not to register to contest the upcoming election, the NLD's recent efforts to stay active in public affairs has clearly agitated the military government.

Anyway, consequences will also depend on what the NLD members attempt to carry out in the months before and after the Nov. 7 election.

When talking about the NLD, no one can exclude Suu Kyi, who is still believed to be the most influential person among the general public. Though her voice was rarely heard during the past 14 years of her house arrest, she's still the most feared political threat to the regime.

After her release, the 64-year-old Nobel laureate is expected to continue what she calls "Burma's second struggle for independence." We'll have to wait and see if she can find a new role for her disbanded party.

According to Nyan Win, her lawyer, she should be released by Nov. 13. But whether or not the generals will release her is still an open question. The release date is only six days after the election and because the generals fear her extraordinary popularity, they may well find an excuse to keep her in detention longer, depriving her of the ability to criticize the outcome of the election.

For years, Burma had a few strong opposition parties or groups. Even NLD efforts were severely curtailed by the junta. Now there is no equivalent political party among the 37 registered parties now contesting the election.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently expressed "concern" over the dissolution of the NLD and nine other parties. But the generals never listened to such concerns. They are only concerned that almost all the seats in the parliaments will be held by the incumbent generals

and recent generals-turned-“politicians” of the Union Solidarity and Development Party led by Prime Minister Thein Sein.

The international community has consistently called for inclusive, free and fair elections, but in fact, even if the elections were fair, things still wouldn't change for the better. The government-backed USDP is the only one that's able to contest all 1,163 seats in the parliament, a fact that can not be overcome by pro-democracy candidates. And finally, the Constitution guarantees the military will occupy 25 percent of the seats in parliament.

Everything is in place for the generals to continue ruling the country: from within the parliament.