

Ban Ki-moon invites his “Group of Friends on Myanmar” and representatives of Security Council countries to a meeting on Thursday to discuss the Burmese regime's election plans.

UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon has invited his “Group of Friends on Myanmar” and representatives of Security Council countries to a meeting on Thursday to discuss the Burmese regime's election plans.

A UN Security Council report on Burma released on Tuesday said the focus of the meeting is expected to be the controversial election laws, which bar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners from participating in the election.

A report is expected to be presented by Vijay Nambiar, the Secretary-General's chief of staff, who has been acting as a temporary adviser on Burma to Ban Ki-moon since Ibrahim Gambari's departure at the end of December 2009. This will be the first briefing since August 2009, the Security Council report said.

*The Associated Press* reported on Wednesday that UN Spokesman Martin Nesirky said Ban Ki-moon believes it is an appropriate time for another meeting of the “Group of Friends of Myanmar” focusing on the election.

Ban Ki-moon's “Group of Friends on Myanmar” comprises 15 countries—Burma's neighbors, Asian and European countries, and the five permanent UN Security Council members: the US, China, Russia, Britain and France.

Among the five laws announced by the regime earlier this month is one prohibiting anyone convicted of a crime from being a member of a political party and instructing political parties to expel convicted members or face deregistration.

The law leaves the opposition National League for Democracy with the choice between expelling Suu Kyi and contesting the election without her or boycotting the poll. Suu Kyi's

lawyer, Nyan Win, said on Tuesday she was against registering the party to take part in the election, although it was up to the party to decide.

The planned election in Burma is also expected to be a major issue for discussion at a summit meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (Asean) in Vietnam in April, according to a report in *The Jakarta Post*.

Asean leaders will meet in Hanoi on April 8-9 April. Officials say Burma's Asean partners will try to persuade the regime to allow Suu Kyi to participate in the election, according to *The Jakarta Post*

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, who plans to visit Burma on March 30, said recently that his government hopes Suu Kyi will be able to contribute to the democratization process in Burma and expects her to be allowed to take part in the election.

“Suu Kyi’s role [in a future government] could be a positive one, and we hope very much that the authorities in Myanmar also see this,” Marty was quoted as saying.

Roshan Jason, the executive director of the regional rights group Asean Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, told *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday that Asean should “make a stand and draw the line at how much it will allow the regime to discredit the grouping's desire to create a human rights friendly region.”

Jason said Asean had given Burma much freedom and room to manoeuvre in dealing with its domestic issues at the expense of regional credibility. It was evident, however, that the regime did not take seriously the need to adhere to acceptable standards of democracy and human rights.

“It is again a big risk for Asean to continue taking a mild approach towards political events in Burma should they allow the regime to sell the elections to the region in its current form,” he said.