

Though Aung San Suu Kyi has publicly said she is against her party registering, the party leadership remains divided.

On March 29, more than 100 National League for Democracy (NLD) party leaders from across the country will meet at the party's Rangoon headquarters to discuss whether to register the party under the junta's election law. Though Aung San Suu Kyi has publicly said she is against her party registering, the party leadership remains divided. Longtime Suu Kyi supporter Win Tin, 80, who was released in September 2008 after more than 19 years in prison said he would probably retire if the majority decide to register. Khin Maung Swe, 67, a leading party official who spent 14 years in prison supports registration and joining the election even though this means the party must expel Suu Kyi under the junta law. Both spoke to *The Irrawaddy* on the party's future.

### Win Tin



**Question:** Could you give us three specific reasons why you are for or against party registration?

**Answer:** If we register the party, we have to expel Daw Suu and other detained party leaders. The details of the party registration laws are not clear about whether Daw Suu could rejoin the party after her release and it would be up to the election commission. The second reason is that if we register the party we have to vow to protect the junta's Constitution, which we have repeatedly said is unacceptable. The third factor is that after registration, we will have to police the "illegal" activities of party members and warn them they will be expelled if they continue those activities. This will guarantee that no one in the party will dare express his ideas at the risk of imprisonment.

**Q.** *What will happen to the NLD if it decides to contest the elections? And what if not?*

**A:** If the NLD decides not to contest the elections, two things can happen. Either the NLD will cease to be a valid and registered party or the regime will outlaw the party, causing it to lose its identity and party flag. The dignity of the party will increase immensely when we show we are not giving in to the junta's unjust law. We will also have a broader space to operate with the

public because we will show that the principles the party stands for are more important than its mere existence.

**Q.** *Can the NLD expect to gain another landslide victory like it did 20 years ago if it decides to contest the election?*

**A:** The 1988 uprising led by students was one of the main causes which gave the NLD a landslide victory in the 1990 elections. Party leaders like U Aung Shwe only got onto the political stage because of the 1988 uprising. In addition, the military was politically quite weak at the time. The situation is totally different now: we are tied up by various laws and if the party contests the election, there is little or no chance for us to win a majority of seats, much less an overwhelming victory.

**Q.** *How do you foresee the post-election scenario in Burma?*

**A:** This election ensures that two major groups will operate in parliament at different levels: one will be composed of military officers and the other members of multiple political parties made up from business cronies like Tay Za backed by junta groups such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association [USDA] and Swan Arr Shin [a government-organized paramilitary group that suppresses political dissidents]. Besides, the three candidates for the Presidency election will be nominated by the military representatives of the bicameral parliament, but we don't know the procedure for their election [The presidency electoral law will be drawn up later, according to the constitution.] Moreover, the formation of the government will be in the hands of the future President who can appoint either members of parliament or non-elected persons as cabinet ministers. If the president selects members of parliament from a political party, they can't represent their party in the government because they not only have to resign their parliamentary seats but they also have to refrain from party activities.

### **Khin Maung Swe**



**Question:** Could you give us three specific reasons why you are for or against party

registration?

**Answer:** First, I wish to make it clear that we have no intention of marginalizing Aung San Suu Kyi, who is an icon in Burmese politics. But the reason we wish to register the party is because we want Daw Suu to be able to continue to play in the political environment when she is released five or six months later. That's why we need a political party. Secondly, we believe that only by struggling in the legal fold will it be possible for us to fulfill our pledge to democracy, to work for changes in the constitution and national reconciliation. Thirdly, in that process, we don't wish to divide our party members into different groups in contradiction to the party policy of maintaining unity. As there is no viable exit option [if NLD does not register], we don't support not registering the party because we don't want to be the historical culprits blamed for letting the party die.

**Q.** *What will happen to the NLD if it decides to contest the elections? And what if not?*

**A:** If the party participates in the election, it can become a competitive force in the future parliament, contributing to a check-and-balance system in politics that will be in the interests of people. Without political opposition, we will only be left with a sort of one-party political system. If we don't join the election, the people will lose a great party born of the 1988 uprising and faithful to the struggle for democracy, and the people will not have a party to vote for in the election.

**Q.** *Can the NLD expect to gain another landslide victory like it did 20 years ago if it decides to contest the election?*

**A:** I am not sure about a landslide victory, but the party still has the potential to become a competitive force in the parliament.

**Q.** *How do you foresee the post-election scenario in Burma?*

**A:** With military supremacy continuing in the post-election era notwithstanding, the rigid centralization we have today will disappear. By that, I mean the different governmental departments will no longer be under the control of a single person. The legislature will be in a position to change inappropriate laws, including the unjust election law. The more than 75 majority requirement only applies to amendments of the Constitution, which is where the 25 percent of seats reserved for the military will be most significant. But parliament will still have the power to pass bills addressing human rights abuses and socio-economic issues in our country.