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RANGOON—The red and white sign in front of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), headquarters in Rangoon will disappear in the next 15 days.

As a political party, the NLD gained the support of many people from different walks of life for more than 20 years. However, the party will be dissolved in May because of its decision on March 29 not to register as a political party and compete in the election this year.



For now, the ground floor of the headquarters is as lively and busy as before. Tables are occupied by members. Some have come to the office regularly for 20 years, working without a salary. Some of the workers have been imprisoned by the regime only to return upon their release.

A skinny young man and woman said they were waiting for Phyu Phyu Thin, an NLD member who works with HIV/AIDs and TB patients, providing medicine and shelter.

An man from Arakan State who has provided money to help support political prisoners is working at one of the tables. He said the wife of a political prisoner recently asked him if the NLD would continue to provide assistance to political prisoners.

“I had to tell her that I still didn't know, since we haven't said anything about it yet,” said the man.

The party has contributed 5,000 to 8,000 kyat (about US \$5-8) to each political prisoner every month for 10 years. Currently, there are more than 2,100 political prisoners in prisons throughout the country.

Other current party activities include cleaning water wells damaged by Cyclone Nargis in areas where people still have difficulty finding access to drinkable water. Such projects will be harder to undertake in the future, he said.

“But despite the dissolution of our party, we will continue in our struggle for democracy and there will be political activities,” he said.

In the office, members also work on such issues as how to keep office equipment, records and other assets belonging to the party. In the future, said one member, it will be difficult for a group of former members to meet together.

“Even if the NLD existed as a legal political party, we could be arrested. So, if there's no NLD and we meet somewhere even for social purposes, do you think we can avoid being harassed? How are we going to meet?” said a member from Mandalay Division.

A MP-elect from Pegu Division in the 1990 election said military intelligence officers constantly pressured him and others to resign from the NLD, saying that they would be paid as much as 10 million kyat (about \$10,000).

He said that MP-elects in Pegu Division refused the offer, saying “We won't leave the NLD, you can jail us,” and many ended up in prison or what the regime called “government guesthouses.”

He said many MP-elects were able to focus on politics only because of the support from their family.

“My wife has taken care of my family throughout my time in politics,” he said. “She is not in favor of the NLD's dissolution.”

MP-elect Sein Hla Oo said during the NLD meeting on March 29 that if the party was dissolved, he would feel as if half of his heart was taken away.

“I am not happy with the fact that our decision will lead to the end of our organization,” said Tin Oo, the NLD vice chairman. “On the other hand, I am proud of others and myself for making such a dignified decision.”

Quoting Aung San Suu Kyi, who said the NLD would not be destroyed even if it was dissolved, he said it would continue its activities and struggle for democracy.

Veteran NLD leader Win Tin also said that the party has a future.

“Some say the NLD may become an underground organization if it doesn't re-register,” he said. “We will continue our activities in peaceful and non-violent ways.”

In a letter to the public, the party affirmed that under the leadership of Suu Kyi it would continue its aims and objectives.

It's clear the party's social work will go on.

“We have decided to offer food to monks in front of our office until May 4,” said Dr. May Win Myint, a leader of the NLD women's wing. “We will continue to do so after that, but it may not be here.”

“We also think about the continuation of our prayer every Tuesday for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners,” she said.