

201205242 Rev 1  
United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

March 22, 2012



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**NOTE FOR THE SECRETARY**

RELEASE IN  
PART  
1.4(B), B1, 1.4(D)

FROM: EAP – Joseph Yun, Acting  
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SUBJECT: Burma's April 1 By-Elections

A mixed picture has emerged in advance of Burma's April 1 by-elections, with greater inclusiveness and openness on the one hand and credible allegations of election manipulation on the other. At stake are 48 vacant parliamentary seats – less than eight percent of all seats in Burma's Union Parliament. Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and the National League for Democracy (NLD) are contesting 47 of 48 seats, with ASSK a candidate in Kawhmu constituency just outside Rangoon.



B1  
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1.4(D)

She is also concerned with limitations on venues for opposition political rallies and censorship of political speeches. We've also heard reports of intimidation by officials from the ruling party including telling villagers if they voted for opposition parties, "we will wipe you out." While there are plenty of credible allegations, the irregularities appear more a result of traditional hard-ball politicking and locally entrenched interests rather than a central-government directed effort to skew the outcome.

The current campaign is significantly more free and fair than the highly stage-managed 2010 election in which coercion and vote-buying were widespread, according to opposition parties and local NGO contacts. Similar to 1990, ASSK traveled throughout the country to campaign for the NLD, drawing crowds up to an estimated 100,000 persons. With relaxed media restrictions, ASSK is featured widely in the press and broadcasted speeches via state media, though authorities did censor some of her comments. In response to complaints about the voter registration lists, the Union Election Commission allowed the NLD additional time

Classified by Director A/GIS/IPS, DoS on 04/28/2017 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~ Reason: 1.4(B), 1.4(D) ~ Declassify on: 04/27/2027

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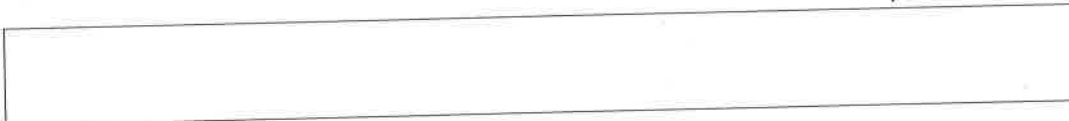
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to vet the lists. Burma's invitation to host international observers, albeit late and not up to international standards, nonetheless is a first step forward.

The Government of Burma invited ASEAN as an institution, ASEAN states, ASEAN dialogue partners including the United States, and the UN to send a select number of representatives and journalists to observe the by-elections. The Burmese government has not accepted full international observer missions or professional NGO election monitors but a number of international and domestic NGOs are inside Burma preparing for informal observation of by-election activity. The Burmese government also invited resident diplomatic missions to observe the elections, as it did in November 2010, but this year sent invitations two weeks in advance as opposed to 48 hours before election day. Embassy contacts report that observers will have access to a constituency of their choosing and be allowed to enter polling stations. It remains unclear if any observers will be allowed to view the vote counting process.

The seats at stake in Burma's by-elections are a fraction of the country's fledgling parliament. Nevertheless, ASSK and NLD's participation have dramatically increased the significance and symbolism of April 1 - now a major milestone if not a referendum on Burmese democracy. We are monitoring the process closely. On April 1, we will send a diplomatic observation mission, two representatives as part of the international observation team, and deploy other embassy staff in key constituencies as part of our own independent effort. We also have a strong network of local contacts in place and will consult closely with ASSK and other stakeholders following the election to assess the credibility of the process.



B1  
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Attachment:

List of Irregularities Documented by the NLD

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Approved: EAP - Joseph Yun ok  
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