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Suu Kyi Warns No Guarantee Myanmar Won't Return to Military Rule

By Klaus Wille & Sharon Chen - Sep 23, 2013 12:00 AM GMT+0800

There is no surety that Myanmar won't return to military rule, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said, even as she called for "responsible investment" to accelerate the country's economic development.

"I cannot guarantee that there will not be backslides," Suu Kyi said at Singapore Management University yesterday. There is a "need to change the constitution, which provides the military with a privileged space in national politics," she said, describing it as the first step toward ensuring the military does not interfere with a civilian government.

Myanmar's shift to democracy after five decades of military rule has drawn interest from companies including Google Inc., Coca-Cola Co. and Unilever Plc, while MasterCard Inc. (MA) last September became the first payments network to issue a license to a bank in the country. Chinese and Japanese companies are also investing in the nation, which borders India, China and Thailand.

Still, the country needs to improve its rule of law and democratic reforms must not wait for 2015, when general elections are scheduled to be held, Suu Kyi said on Sept. 21 during her visit to Singapore. She said in June that she wants to run for president, even as she is ineligible to become head of state under the current constitution.

"If you are going to try to revive the economy, you need capital," Suu Kyi said Sept. 21, when asked if investors should wait for more political stability before committing resources to the country. "I wouldn't advise you to draw out. I would like you to continue your investments. But make them as responsible as possible."

Stable Transition

Myanmar must question whether its transition to democracy is stable and strong enough, Suu Kyi said yesterday. She cannot run for president because the constitution says the president can't have a child who is the citizen of a foreign country, and her two sons are British nationals.



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The country's parliament has said it plans to review the 2008 military-drafted constitution, with a commission to recommend changes. Suu Kyi has strengthened ties with the military since joining parliament, while President Thein Sein's shift toward democracy has prompted countries such as the U.S. to ease sanctions.

Suu Kyi yesterday asked young people in the country to contribute more to society. She also said she does not blame citizens who want to detach themselves from Myanmar and make a life for themselves abroad.

"I want the young people to help in transition," she said in a separate speech organized by the Myanmar Club in Singapore. "Don't wait for the situation inside the country to improve," she told hundreds of nationals who gave her a standing ovation when she appeared on stage.

Ethnic Groups

It is the government's responsibility to diminish the fear of attack by ethnic groups through the enforcement of just laws, Suu Kyi said yesterday. Sectarian violence erupted last June between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine state, and many of Myanmar's 64 million people view the 800,000 Rohingya as illegal migrants from what is now Bangladesh.

The government must also protect its people and the country from "rapacious" multinationals or individuals through rule of law, transparency and accountability, she said. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry said in a statement it held a meeting with Suu Kyi about the business and investment environment in Myanmar.

The country needs clean courts, more efficient law enforcement and an independent judiciary, which is "one of the first requirements for the rule of law," Suu Kyi separately said Sept. 21. A firmer rule of law will include changes to the constitution, she said, without giving details.

The investment scene in the Southeast Asian nation "is not as bright as people had hoped it would be" and investors "are not sure that their investment will be safe and secure because there isn't a rule of law," Suu Kyi said.



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