

# Soldiers shouldn't be in govt, says Suu Kyi

She wants change to Constitution to keep the army professional

By CASSANDRA CHEW

SOLDIERS should not be in government, Myanmar's democracy icon and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said.

Instead, Myanmar should change its Constitution to have a professional army, as in Britain, which is "well looked after by a civilian government and loved by its people".

"It's not that I want the leopard to change its spots. I just want the leopard to stay very beautiful and dignified in the jungle," she said of the military, half in jest.

She was answering a question on whether, given the military's tendency to claim power by force, a leopard can change its spots, during a lecture at Singapore Management University yesterday.

She recalled how her father, General Aung San - who led then Burma to independence from British colonial rule - set an example when he resigned from the military to join politics in 1945.

After decades of military rule, Myanmar under President Thein Sein, a retired general, has undergone political reforms that give it a semi-civilian government in which the military is given 25 per cent of seats in Parliament.

Ms Suu Kyi, chairman of the Lower House Committee on the Rule of Law, Peace and Tranquilli-



Ms Suu Kyi addressing 5,800 members of the Myanmar community at the Resorts World Convention Centre yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

ty in Myanmar's Parliament, was speaking to more than 400 government officials, business leaders, academics and students at the Ho Rih Hwa Leadership in Asia Public Lecture. Among them were Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim and Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport Josephine Teo.

On the subject of leadership, she gave an example of how a

leader can, through respect, win over the electorate.

When she met some poor farmers who were going to lose some land to a road-widening project, they did not want compensation, and simply appreciated being consulted. They even told her the project would require more land.

A good leader must be prepared to make decisions that are unpopular but necessary, even if

this means he or she may not get re-elected, she said. "Sometimes, you have to undertake unpopular decisions if you think that is good for the country in the long run, and that is a test of true leadership."

She said her own decision not to contest in the 2010 Myanmar general election, and later to participate in the 2012 by-elections, were both difficult decisions because many disagreed with her.

"In the end, you have to decide what is right, not just what people expect you to do," she said.

A leader also has the responsibility of guiding those under his care towards a more civilised society that retains the best values during the time he is given, said the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in her 20-minute speech.

"The mindset of leadership is the determination to serve, not to lead, and it is the determination and the commitment to serve that decides who is the real leader, and not the desire to be a leader," she said.

Earlier yesterday, she met 5,800 members of the Myanmar community living in Singapore at Resorts World Convention Centre, where she urged them to contribute to their home country.

Ms Suu Kyi is in Singapore on a five-day visit. Today, she will call on several Singapore leaders, including President Tony Tan Keng Yam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

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