

## Myanmar's Suu Kyi Urges More Investment in Jobs

**Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi sketched out her vision for reform and economic growth during a visit to Singapore, saying the transition to civilian rule has been too slow.**

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SINGAPORE—Myanmar opposition leader Aung San [Suu Kyi](#) sketched out her vision for reform and economic growth during a visit to Singapore, saying the transition to civilian rule has been too slow and setting out her priorities for general elections in two years.

"I think we have to question how far along the way this transition process is, or whether it is genuine enough, whether it is stable enough, whether it is strong enough," Ms. Suu Kyi said in a speech Sunday at Singapore Management University. Myanmar's leaders need to be focused "on doing what is right for the country."

The Southeast Asian nation is emerging from decades of military dictatorship to a civilian government composed mostly of former generals. Ms. Suu Kyi has said that she wishes to contest the presidency in 2015 but the constitution, imposed by the former military rulers, must first be changed to allow her to run.

Ms. Suu Kyi's four-day visit to Singapore, Southeast Asia's major financial center, featured a pair of speeches widely seen as an opportunity to hear her economic and political priorities as investors consider entering or expanding their presence in Myanmar in the election run-up.

Ms. Suu Kyi's long years as a political prisoner made her an icon of democracy, but her views on how to develop the country, Southeast Asia's poorest, remain unclear. Business leaders and government officials look to high-profile summits like this one in the hopes that she will clarify her economic policies and priorities, especially important since this was her first trip to Singapore, where many global companies and potential investors in the region are based.

Ms. Suu Kyi, speaking at the annual Singapore Summit on Saturday, stressed the importance of responsible investment and targeting human talent rather than the country's rich reserves of natural resources, which include oil and gas, timber, tin and copper. The summit aims to bring together diplomats and business leaders to discuss growth and development in Asia.



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Her comments were consistently met by thunderous applause. In question-and-answer sessions, business leaders, including Martin Sorrell, founder of London-based advertising and public-relations firm WPP, asked how their investments could benefit her country.

"I am asking for caring, intelligent investment," said Ms. Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. "We've got to look to rural development, to small and medium enterprises" to ensure equitable growth and development.

But it remains to be seen whether investment in Myanmar will pick up. Many companies are holding off, owing to skyrocketing property prices and continued uncertainty about the political and legal infrastructure. American firms, in particular, are held back by lingering U.S. sanctions that prevent them from working with 100 or so "specially designated nationals" considered cronies of the previous military government.

"You get a sense of frustration [from companies] that you did not feel four or five months ago," said Anthony Nelson, director at the US-Asean Business Council. The accumulated approved foreign direct investment in Myanmar as of end August, according to government figures, is US\$43.6 billion, though more than three-quarters of this is concentrated in oil and gas and power.

Ms. Suu Kyi said in her appearances that the lives of many rural people had not materially changed since the shift to democracy began three years ago. She said that job creation must be a priority, as well as reconciliation with ethnic minority groups who have long been marginalized and in many cases waged war on and off with central authorities.

"I am afraid that there are members of our government who think of the transition in economic terms," Ms. Suu Kyi said. "But I think that the success of our genuine reform would depend on how much inclusiveness we can create in our society."

Some business leaders looking to invest in Myanmar worry privately that should Ms. Suu Kyi assume the presidency, the country's openness to foreign investment will change. Others wonder about the effectiveness of her National League for Democracy in dealing with economic issues because its focus has mostly been on human rights and democracy in struggling for decades against military rule.

Party stalwarts spent decades under incarceration, and even now, with just 6% of seats in Parliament under the current constitution that favors the military and its allies, have not been as intimately involved with drafting new legislation or the country's business framework.



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Ms. Suu Kyi insisted in her speeches that rule of law is crucial for attracting investment and for solving communal conflicts that have plagued Myanmar in the past year and raised the risk profile, including violence between the Buddhist majority and minority Muslims that have seen at least 200 people killed and more than 150,000 displaced.

She didn't elaborate what she would do differently from the current government, however, other than push for a more independent judiciary.