

# Suu Kyi Signals Willingness for Presidential Bid in Three Years

By SAM HOLMES  
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NEW YORK - The election is three years away, but Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has taken a hedged step in signaling a run for the presidency in what amounts to an incremental test of the ruling regime's willingness to further democratic reforms.

Back from a 17-day tour of the U.S., where she was lauded as a champion of democracy, Suu Kyi told a news conference in Rangoon that responsibility as leader of her National League for Democracy would require her to serve as president if Burma's people will it.

The statement built on past comments that cited her status as a party leader as an obligation to hold office, which she cited to justify taking a seat in Parliament in April. Her response Monday to a reporter's question fell far short of a formal declaration for the presidency, but did put an unspoken assumption into the open.



Reuters

**Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi talks about her U.S. visit during a news conference at the National League for Democracy head office in Rangoon on Monday.**

Jan Zalewski, South Asia analyst for IHS-Jane's, said that the statement could make President Thein Sein's "careful balancing act" between pro- and anti-reform factions in the powerful military more difficult. It also signals that Suu Kyi is becoming more difficult to marginalize.

"Suu Kyi is gaining in political

acumen; her role in the country's politics is changing, as is the NLD's," Zalewski said. "At the same time, there's a lot going on behind the scenes that point to power struggles, partially between those that would welcome such changes, and those that would vehemently oppose them."

Suu Kyi's opponents have a pow-

erful tool. The country's current Constitution would block her from running, since it prohibits presidential candidates whose spouses or children are foreign citizens. Suu Kyi is the widow of British academic Michael Aris and they have two children. Suu Kyi stated Monday that her party would seek constitutional changes.

Thein Sein, who was rewarded in his own recent trip to Washington with the lifting of import sanctions against Burma, hasn't ruled out another term for himself but said in a recent BBC interview that he could accept Suu Kyi as leader if Burma's people wanted it.

The long-isolated country, which came under military rule in 1962, has made enormous strides to more open politics and human rights reform in the two years since Thein Sein came to power. But the large military remains extremely influential in the country and the political players must constantly take its temperature.