
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 5

SENIOR JUNTA OFFICIALS ELECTED AS HEADS OF PARLIAMENT

On Monday, 31 January, the first session of Burma's military-dominated Parliament occurred in a rigid but calm atmosphere, as two top members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were named as the heads of the Parliament's two houses. The junta's 3rd- and 4th-ranking officials, Thura Shwe Mann and Tin Aung Myint Oo, and its Prime Minister, Thein Sein, representing the USDP, attended the Parliament without giving up their government positions. The sessions, which began at 8:55 in the morning and concluded at 16:00 in the afternoon, consisted mainly of swearing in MPs and choosing the heads and deputy heads of the upper and lower houses of Parliament. Shwe Mann was elected in a majority vote of 370 as the head of the Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw), thereby ending speculation that he would become president. The election of another USDP top candidate, Minister for Culture Khin Aung Myint, as head of the Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw) came as no surprise to the handful of MPs from opposition parties, since the vote was dominated by USDP MPs and military representatives. The military appointees, who occupy 25% of seats in both houses, attended the session in their military uniforms. In the afternoon, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, a combination of both houses, was called with Khin Aung Myint acting as its speaker. The Parliament will convene again for a second day on 1 February for the election of 3 vice presidents, the MPs said, adding that the formation of the new government is expected to be completed within this week. The convening of Parliament took place amid tight security in Nay Pyi Taw and the former capital Rangoon. The media has been granted no access to the Parliament building, and reporters covering the event in Nay Pyi Taw were not allowed to go inside the state-run guesthouse where the MPs were staying.¹

USDP MEMBERS NEW CHIEF, CHAIRMAN OF RANGOON ASSEMBLY

Two members of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were elected respectively as the chief and the chairman of the Rangoon Regional Assembly. Sein Tin Win of Kunchankone Township was elected chief of the assembly and Maung Maung Win of Shwepyithar Township was elected chairman of the assembly. There are a total of 123 lawmakers in the Rangoon Division Assembly - 31 are from the military, 2 are ethnic parliamentary representatives, 73 are from the USDP, and 17 are from other political parties. Local residents said the Rangoon Division Assembly was held in the old parliament building on Pyi Road in Rangoon that was built during the socialist era.²

USDP MEMBER ELECTED CHIEF OF MON STATE ASSEMBLY

Members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) were elected as Chief, Assistant chief and Chairman of the Mon State Assembly. Kyin Pe, a lawmaker from Chaungzon Township constituency No. (2), was elected as chief of the assembly, Htay Lwin, a lawmaker from Kyaikto constituency No. (1), was elected as the assistant chief, and Ohn Myint, a retired Brigadier General and a lawmaker from Mudon constituency No. (1) was elected chairman. Naing Ngwe Thein, the Chairman of the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), said that his party nominated Dr. Min Nwe Soe from the AMRDP who received seven votes and Kyin Pe received 24 votes. Similarly, the USDP nominated Htay Lwin assistant chief of the assembly and the AMRDP nominated Min Nwe Soe again. Htay Lwin defeated Min Nwe Soe, 23 votes to eight. There are a total of 31 lawmakers in the

¹ Senior Junta Officials Elected as Heads of Parliament - http://www.irrawaddy.org/highlight.php?art_id=20640 (Irrawaddy) 31 January 2011

² USDP members new chief, chairman of Rangoon Assembly - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/4824-usdp-members-new-chief-chairman-of-rangoon-assembly.html> (Mizzima) 31 January 2011

Mon State Assembly - 11 are from the USDP, 7 from the AMRDP, 2 from the National Unity Party, 8 from the military and 3 are ethnic parliamentary representatives. The parliamentary session was held in the Yamanya Hall, which is also the site of the Mon State Peace and Development Council office.³

MON PARTY TO INTRODUCE FARM OWNERSHIP BILL

The All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) will introduce a Parliamentary bill to allow farmers to own their farms. According to party leader Nai Ngwe Thein, "We heard recently about the land confiscation cases in Kyaikmaraw to build a cement factory. We discussed that case in our party's central committee meeting. We want farmers to own their own farms, and we will propose it." In January, Mon MPs-elect travelled to Ye, Thanbyuzayat, Mudon, Chaungzon and Kyaikmaraw to conduct an informal survey of people's opinions about private ownership of farms. Many residents in Kyaikmaraw, Mudon and Ye said that their land had been confiscated including some farm land for dam projects, according to the party. Residents in Kyaikmaraw said that the Zaygabar Company Limited had seized more than 800 acres of farm land during the previous months, said party officials. During 2002-2003 the army confiscated land in Ye and Thanbyuzayat in Mon State and Yephyu in Taninsarim Division. More than 12,000 acres of farmland have been confiscated since 2010 according to a report compiled by a local NGO. The proposal is likely to fail in Parliament, but Nai Ngwe Thein said it was important to introduce the issue for discussion.⁴

CHIN PARTY URGES LIFTING OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ON BURMA

The Chin Progressive Party (CPP), which won 11 out of 39 seats in Chin state in the November 2010 elections, has issued a statement urging a review and lifting of sanctions on Burma by the international community, including the United States of America and the European Union. The statement points out how the sanction is aggravating the hardships and suffering of the majority of Burmese people, especially the poverty-stricken border area ethnic people. The sanctions by World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, foreign trade and investments especially from the West have come to a grinding halt, severely hampering development work. "The sanctions not only hurt the military government but also the poor people of Burma. Western countries should review the economic sanctions. If the sanctions are lifted, the people will be helped. Therefore we urge the countries to lift its sanctions," said CPP secretary Mr. Sein Htun. The statement said "we entreat the governments of United States of America, Canada, Australia, Norway, European Union, and World Bank and International Monetary Fund to seriously consider lifting economic sanctions imposed on Myanmar as early as possible."⁵

PEACE AND DIVERSITY PARTY (PDP) CHAIRMAN RESIGNS

U Nyo Min Lwin, currently serving as chairman of the Peace and Diversity Party (PDP), has decided to resign from his post. While the party waits to nominate a new leader, PDP General-Secretary U Nay Myo Wai has assumed the party chairmanship. According to sources, Nyo Min Lwin made the decision to leave the party on 21 January and has officially informed the Union Election Commission (UEC) of his decision to retire. In a recently released statement, changes will be made to reform the party's existing 17-member Central Executive Committee (CEC), however no exact time frame for

³ USDP member elected chief of Mon State Assembly - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010-/4826-usdp-member-elected-chief-of-mon-state-assembly.html> (Mizzima) 31 January 2011

⁴ Mon party to introduce farm ownership bill - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010-/4794-mon-party-to-introduce-farm-ownership-bill.html> (Mizzima) 25 January 2011

⁵ Chin party urges lifting of economic sanctions on Burma - <http://www.khonumthung.org/news.php?readmore=366> (Khonumthung) 25 January 2011

reforms have yet to be fixed said Nay Myo Wai. With Nay Myo Wai assuming the role as party chair, U Tin Maung Aye will assume the post as the party's secretary-general.⁶

PHALON-SAWAW DEMOCRATIC PARTY TO RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS

The Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP) which contested the 7 November elections is drawing up plans to strengthen its party membership and will begin a recruitment campaign in March, according to its chairman U Saw Khin Maung Myint. The party is aiming to launch the campaign in Ayeyawaddy, Yangon, Bago and Taninthayi regions as well as in Mon state, said Khin Maung Myint. The promotion of literature and culture will be used to attract and recruit new members and the opportunity to open new party branches will also be on the party's future agenda. At present, the PSDP has a 30,000 strong membership and won 9 seats in the 7 November elections: 2 in the Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw), 3 in the Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw) and 4 in the Region and State hluttaws.⁷

ANALYSIS

The first day of Burma's new parliamentary sessions have brought the elections of junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) officials as speakers of both the Upper and Lower Houses. Early as it may be, such signs show once again that the proceedings in Burma's parliamentary system will remain under the control of the military and its proxy party. However, that being said, the relationship between the military and the USDP will need to be monitored closely. Unconfirmed sources within the country have said that Senior-General Than Shwe reportedly reminded military commanders that they must be prepared to launch a "coup d'etat" if the USDP party fails to live up to the country's needs. Such comments will not go down well with the many unhappy military officials who have been forced to retire to assume role as would-be politicians of the USDP. The state of play between them and their interactions with each other will surely prove to be crucial in shaping the political landscape in Burma. Ethnic-based political parties have been overwhelmingly sidelined in the nomination process in selecting the speakers in the Upper and Lower Houses. However, their role in the various regions and states will depend on how they tackle the issues, as well as how they engage with the ruling the USDP party.

⁶ Peace and Diversity party (PDP) chairman resigns - <http://www.myanmar.mmtimes.com/2011/news/503/news03.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 January 2011.

⁷ Phalon-Sawaw democratic party to recruit new members - <http://www.myanmar.mmtimes.com/2011/news/503/news05.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 January 2011.