
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 12

NLD PARTY KICK STARTS REFORM

Reform of the youth wing of Burma's main opposition party is underway following a warning from detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi that the party was being restricted by an ageing leadership. The National League for Democracy (NLD) Youth Coordinator, Hla Oo, said that work had already begun on a Rangoon Division NLD youth network. He added that the party's women's network was also being shaken up. "Our objectives are to reinforce the party with youth working groups and install these across the Divisions and States," he said. "Township-level groups are to implement the youth working groups in villages." Currently there are around 70 NLD youth networks across Burma. A recent meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and three elderly party members of the NLD CEC exposed a potentially weak upper rung, which analysts then followed with a suggestion for new blood in the party. At 64, Suu Kyi is the youngest of the 11-member Central Executive Committee (CEC), of which nine are in their 80s and 90s and most of them are said to be in bad health. It will be the 1st time in the party's 21-year history that any significant reorganization has taken place. Development of the party has been severely hindered by Suu Kyi's spells under house arrest, which in total amount to 14 of the past 20 years. "We aim to form youth working groups in townships in all 14 divisions in states across the country and to strengthen the youth network," Hla Oo said. A meeting has been called for in January 2010 to discuss further details regarding the formation of the working groups.

MUSLIM BUSINESSMEN TOLD TO HELP NATIONAL UNITY PARTY (NUP) IN RAKHINE STATE

Burmese military authorities have tasked two Muslim businessmen from Rangoon to mobilize the Muslim community in Maungdaw Township in the Rakhine State to support the National Unity Party (NUP) in the forthcoming 2010 election, said a local Muslim leader. The NUP was formed on 26 September 1988, from what had been the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). The party was created to provide a new civilian face for the military junta that had only recently recovered its position in a coup after the 1988 mass disturbances in the country. Aung Zaw Win has been ordered to organize Muslims from northern Maungdaw Township while Aung Naing was told to organize the Muslim community in southern Maungdaw Township. The two Muslim businessmen who now live in Rangoon, the former capital of Burma, are originally from Maungdaw Township. According to one community leader, the two businessmen accompanied Western Command Commander General Thaug Aye and introduced him to the local residents during a recent visit to Maungdaw. The reason behind the government's promotion of the NUP among the Muslim community in Maungdaw Township remains unclear, but a local businessman confirmed that recently they were summoned by Na-Sa-Ka (Burma's Border Security Force Headquarters) and pressurized into supporting the NUP in the

elections. "Muslim leaders promised their backing and support for the NUP for fear of oppression against them by Na-Sa-Ka officials. The military regime has provided the NUP support and allowed the party to mobilize for the 2010 elections freely within the Rakhine State. The NUP has been given the opportunity to open its local offices in Yathei-taung, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Sittwe, Kyauktaw and Kyaukphyu townships.

NUP CAMPAIGNS IN MUDON TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

Members of the NUP have started campaigning for support in Mudon Township, Mon State and have been lobbying for support according to local residents. "The [NUP] has organized visits to local villages in Mudon township and surrounding areas, and during the visits NUP members have been persuading the locals to vote for them with promises of lower tax rates and business benefits in return for their support," said a woman from the township. According to one villager who attended the meeting in Mudon, NUP members attempted to rally Mudon residents to support their party and highlighted the refusal of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) to participate in the coming 2010 elections. The NUP began campaigning in Mudon Township four months ago, but due to the vast number of villages in the area, they were unable to finish, and have only recently renewed their campaign in the area. While the elections are scheduled for 2010 and the constitution ratified in 2008, the official electoral laws have yet to be released. Additionally, the registration process for new parties has yet to be announced.

JUNTA COLLECTING EXISTING POLITICAL PARTIES' MEMBERS LIST IN SHAN STATE

Military Affairs Security (MAS) authorities in Lashio, capital of Shan State North, have ordered local authorities to collect lists of members of political parties in Lashio who contested in the 1990 elections, according to reliable sources from the town. The MAS has demanded that the list be compiled with the names of the political parties, their current membership and details of existing members. Currently, there are about seven political parties registered in Lashio, namely; the National League for Democracy (NLD), Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKDP), Wa National Development Party (WNDP) and the National Unity Party (NUP). The purpose of compiling the lists have not been disclosed, however, local people commented that it could be connected to the planned 2010 elections with the information being used to monitor activities of political parties and their members.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY STARTS POLL WORK

Women members of the Democratic Party (DP) have begun organizational work for the elections in some townships in Rangoon Division. An official from the DP headquarters said that they had started organizational tours in Twante, Thone Gwa, Seikgyi-Khanaungto, Kyimyindine, South Dagon, North Dagon, South Okkalapa, and Yankin Townships, totalling eight townships. "We conducted door-to-door visits in these townships and most of our work was done in my home in South Okkalapa Township.

We distributed the work among former Democracy Party members and sympathisers. The organizational work started since we established our party,” DP Organizational coordinator, Tin Tin Mya (65) said. She served in the same position in the Democracy Party which was deregistered by the military regime after it contested in the 1990 general elections. Currently there are 20 core members of the party and most cannot list their names as party members as they are still awaiting the declaration of the election law. According to Tin Tin Mya, the recent organizational tours of the DP party have been monitored by personnel from the Rangoon Police Special Branch (SB), who visited the houses of the members involved. She further added that after the election law and regulations are enacted and promulgated, they will undertake similar organizational tours to Pyapon, Bogale, Dedeye and Kyaiklatt Townships in Irrawaddy Division and Myingyan Township in Mandalay Division, amongst others. “The remaining townships in Rangoon Division such as Taikgyi, Hmawbi, Shwepyithar, Hlaingtharyar among others have been visited by our party members so we don’t need to visit these again,” Tin Tin Mya said. The DP was formed in June 2009 with 15 members of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), headed by Chairman U Thu Wei and daughters of former political leaders, Than Than Nu, Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein and Nay Yee Ba Swe as prominent members of the party.

AUTHORITIES DEMAND DATA ON OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS

Opposition party members in Burma are being forced to divulge personal details about their families and jobs to intelligence officers, reportedly on instruction from senior government officials. Lists of National League for Democracy (NLD) members in Mandalay Division, Kachin State and Bago Division have been drawn up, while birth dates of divisional members of Mandalay’s Chanmyaytharzan Township were collected recently, NLD organizing member Myo Naing said. “They didn’t come openly; local authorities came to ask our dates of birth,” he said. “They said they did it under order of senior authorities. I saw the list of the names of four to five NLD members in our ward.” Another NLD member in Mandalay division, Tun Tun, said that it was not clear why surveillance was being stepped up. “They are mainly collecting [data] in rural areas. In urban areas, they collect them in satellite towns,” he said. “When I asked them they said they do it under instruction from the top.” In Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, NLD members are being photographed and told to answer questionnaires. They are also told to list their siblings, their addresses and jobs. At the same time, NLD leaders in Mandalay sent a directive to colleagues not to reveal data of party members, Mandalay Northwest Township MP-elect Tin Aung Aung said. Khin Maung Swe, from the NLD’s information wing, said that authorities have no right to collect data. “It is not in accordance with the law for non-NLD party members to collect details of party members,” he said. “If they did, we will investigate it and carry out appropriate action.” The NLD is yet to announce whether it will participate in the 2010 elections. Critics of the government say that the 2008 constitution, on which these elections are based, will

entrench military rule in the country, while detained NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi is barred from running for office.

MINISTER FOR INDUSTRY LOBBYS SHAN NATIONALS IN MANDALAY

During a recent visit to Mandalay Division, the Minister for Industry and member of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), U Aung Thaung met with local Shan community elders and members of social organizations in a bid to win support for the 2010 elections, according to a local resident. The Minister held separate discussions with representatives from social welfare organizations, community elders and members of the Shan Literary and Cultural Organisations at a guesthouse on 22nd Street in Mandalay. The regime, in an attempt to foster support and acquire electoral votes, is targeting the 80,000 strong Shan population living in and around Mandalay, Maymyo and Moegok, according to a local Shan national. The Minister also urged those attending the meeting to nominate a suitable candidate to represent them in the planned 2010 elections.

ANALYSIS

As the election year is ushered in, government supported and opposition political parties are taking steps to prepare themselves for the elections. After a recent meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and three CEC members, reform of the NLD party is now taking shape with plans to introduce a younger generation of NLD leaders to replace the existing ageing CEC members. No formal decisions have been reached on the actual reforms, however effective strategies coupled with speedy implementation plans are now needed more than ever for the NLD to secure its existence. It is clear that the strategy to entrust prominent local leaders and businessmen to lobby local residents and communities has become a key element and strategy of the junta as it prepares for the elections. The activities of the Democratic Party shows not only the willingness and desire of the party itself, but also the personal aspirations of party members to bring about change in Burma. The desire of the people is for a peaceful transition and change for the benefit of all, while the military stands firm to maintain control of the country and any form of change will be based on conditions and terms dictated by the SPDC. To assure that any form of resistance is nullified, precautions and measures have been put in place by the SPDC to totally dismantle the opposition in every possible way. The recent activities undertaken by the regime to order local authorities to compile lists pertaining to existing political parties, their members and the requisition of personal data can be seen as a tactic to intimidate and frustrate the opposition. No logical reasoning or answer can be found to respond to these actions but to accept the reality and to see it as another indication of the power and ability of the regime as it strives to implement the Seven Step-Road Map to Democracy.