
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 17

ELECTION COMMISSION ANNOUNCES PARTY REGISTRATION AND PARLIAMENT BY LAWS

The Union Election Commission of the Union of Myanmar on 17 March 2010 issued:

1. Political Parties Registration Bylaws under Notification No.1/2010,
2. Pyi-thu- Hluttaw Election Bylaws under Notification No. 2/2010,
3. A-myo-tha Hluttaw Election Bylaws under Notification No.3/2010 and
4. Region Hluttaw or State Hluttaw Election Bylaws under Notification No.4/2010

Under the Political Registration Bylaws, parties that wish to participate in the forthcoming elections will be required to pay 300,000 Kyats (US\$300) as registration fee with candidates allowed to spend up to 10 million Kyats (US\$10,000) on canvassing. The rule, announced by the Election Commission on March 17th, also stated that the registration must be endorsed and signed by the Chairman and Secretary of the party. Moreover, political parties are required to submit a list of members within 90 days after registration and with the minimum of at least 1,000 registered members nationwide.¹

SEVEN PARTIES READY TO REGISTER FOR ELECTION

At least seven political groups are now preparing to register with the Election Commission said Kyi Win, leader of a Rangoon-based party. They include:

1. National Unity Party (NUP) formerly the Burmese Socialist Programme Party,
2. Democratic Party (DPM),
3. Union of Myanmar National Political Force,
4. 88 Generation Students Union of Myanmar,
5. Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), backed by the SPDC.

A prominent Shan political leader, Shwe Ohn is also planning to contest the elections it is learnt...²

KACHIN PARTY TO CONTEST 2010 POLLS

The Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) led by Dr Manam Tuja, former leader of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is entering the electoral fray with the requisite 15 Central Committee members and a minimum of 500 party members in Kachin State. The party is now preparing to register itself within the 60 days as stipulated in the party registration law, and its leaders have promised to work for the progress and development of education, health and the social status of Kachin nationals.³

DEMOCRATIC PARTY GEARING UP TO BE IN ELECTION FRAY

The Democratic Party - Myanmar (DPM) headed by veteran politician U Thu Wai together with daughters of former leaders of the country are gearing up to contest the forthcoming elections. The DPM has been working towards forming a political party since the end of last year to contest the elections but could not do so officially because electoral laws were not announced till recently. "The

¹ Election Commission Announces Party Registration and Parliament Election Bylaws - <http://mizzima.com/news/breaking-and-news-brief/3683-election-commission-announces-party-registration-fees-.html> (Mizzima) 18 March 2010.

² Seven Parties Ready to Register for Election - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18034. (Irrawaddy) 13 March 2010.

³ Kachin Party to Contest 2010 Polls - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3667-kachin-party-to-contest-2010-polls.html>. (Mizzima) 15 March 2010.

DPM has party branches in Rangoon and Mandalay Divisions, and therefore could operate within the law” said party leader Thu Wai. Prominent members of the DPM party include –

- Than Than Nu; daughter of former Prime Minister U Nu,
- Nay Yee Ba Swe, daughter of former Prime Minister Ba Swe and
- Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein; daughter of the former Vice Prime Minister Kyaw Nyein.⁴

CHIN POLITICIANS GEAR UP FOR 2010 ELECTIONS IN BURMA

A group of Chin politicians are now preparing to participate in the general elections. The ‘Chin League Party’ was derecognized in 1990 by the junta. Therefore a similar would be chosen to represent the party, said a Chin politician. Soon after the 1990 elections, as part of a crack-down by the regime on politicians and parties, many parties including the Chin National League for Democracy-(CNLD), Zomi National Congress-(ZNC) and the Mara People’s Party-(MPP) were banned. Chin political activists want a new party, which can include all politicians in the various townships in Chin State. In the 1990 elections, Chin State was divided into 13 constituencies and Chin National League for Democracy won four seats, Zomi National Congress won two seats, Mara People’s Party won one seat, National United Party won one seat and the National League of Democracy won four seats in Parliament.⁵

ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINS IN KAREN STATE

Since the release of the election laws, several prominent Karen nationals are reportedly busy forming political parties to contest this year’s general election, while others are preparing to stand individually according to local residents and news media sources. Those involved in campaigns include:

- Colonel Saw Khin Soe, a retired Karen military officer in the Burmese Army, and
- Dr. Simon Tha, a well-known Karen physician.

At present Saw Khin Soe has yet to establish a party, but has been campaigning people to vote for candidates who will promote the best interests on the Karen people. According to Karen sources, he is believed to have the trust of the regime as well as being respected by Karen people including members of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). Saw Khin Soe’s group has been conducting campaigns in and around Pa-an, the capital of Karen State as well as other major towns including Kawkaik, Hlaing-bwe and Thandaung.

Dr. Simon Tha, a well-known physician and peace negotiator is forming the Karen-People Party (KPP). It is based in Rangoon and will represent all Karen nationals and use the Karen national flag as its standard. Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Pegu Divisions and Mon State have been slated as the party’s main electoral campaign grounds owing to the large majority of Karens living there. Dr. Tha came to prominence for his involvement in arranging the peace talks between the KNU leader Bo Mya and former regime strong-man Khin Nyunt back in 2004, and at present holds the position as Chairman of Karen Development Committee based in Rangoon. Three Karen political parties were formed at the time of the 1990 elections: the Karen State Nationals Organization (KSNO), the Union Karen League, and the Karen National Congress for Democracy. The KSNO won in one constituency while the National League for Democracy (NLD) won in 10 of the 14 constituencies in Karen State.⁶

DEPUTY HOME MINISTER ARRIVES IN MAUNGDAW FOR ELECTION CAMPAIGN

⁴ Democratic Party Gearing up to be in Election Fray - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3666-democratic-party-gearing-up-to-be-in-election-fray.html>. (Mizzima) 15 March 2010.

⁵ Chin Politicians Gear up for 2010 Election in Burma - <http://www.khonumthung.com/kng-news/09-news/chin-politicians-gear-up-for-2010-elections-in-burma/>. (Khonumthung) 15 March 2010

⁶ Election Campaign Begins in Karen State - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18053. (Irrawaddy) 16 March 2010.

SPDC's Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brigadier General Phone Swe recently visited Maungdaw together with Muslim businessmen from Rangoon to tackle the election campaign in the Muslim dominated area of Burma. Then Deputy Minister was accompanied by Aung Naing and Aung Zaw Win – two prominent businessmen from Rangoon. They will be running in the election in Maungdaw township according to those who attended the meeting. The two businessmen are natives of Maungdaw - Aung Naing is from Nga Khu Ra Village while Aung Zaw Win is from Ale Than Kyaw. Muslim communities in northern Arakan State will be able to vote in the election even though the authority has issued them the white ID cards used for foreign nationals. A former member of the Arakan League for Democracy in Maungdaw who wished to remain anonymous said that Muslim communities in Maungdaw and Buthidaung will vote for their Muslim leaders and not junta associates, due to their dislike of the regime and the oppression and discrimination of Muslims in Burma. Under such circumstances, the authorities are now engaging in activities to woo the Muslim communities to support pro-military government candidates in the upcoming elections.⁷

ANALYSIS

The scene is now set for the holding of the long-awaited 2010 elections. While some groups are registering parties, many existing opposition parties remain undecided. The parties do not now have the leisure of debating the legality of the Constitution or the electoral laws since they have to register within 60 days of the announcement of the Political Parties Registration Bylaw. Decisions will need to be made quickly if they want to compete, while at the same time, the parties will need to focus on their election manifestos.

The decision taken by some of the Kachin, Chin and Karen nationals to take part in the election reflects once again that Burma's national reconciliation process leading to democratisation cannot be achieved without the ethnic groups in Burma.

But with the Border Guard Forces issues still remaining unresolved, rumours have started to circulate that the regime might resort to using quick-fix solution by branding these groups " Unlawful Organisation". This will allow the SPDC to disband them or take whatever necessary measures against them. The idea would be to clear the decks before the elections. All parties opposing the present electoral process could also fall under the same axe and be disqualified similar to what happened to some parties in 1990. However, if the SPDC miscalculates and the ethnic ceasefire groups fight back and the fighting intensifies, the SPDC may change its game plan and use the instability as a pretext to postpone elections indefinitely.

The government-backed USDA and some of its allied parties have been allowed to campaign extensively even prior to the promulgation of the election laws, for over a year now. Opposition parties and ethnic parties, however, have not been able to organize openly until recently. Therefore, the elections will definitely not be fair.

While electoral laws provide for a relatively 'free' vote on voting day with representatives of political parties present at the polling station, the extensive powers given to the Election Commission effectively nullifies that 'freedom'. In other words, the Election Commission will pre-screen political parties and candidates that will be allowed to run. Only those who are not deemed 'dangerous' to the SPDC will be allowed to proceed to the voting stage. At that point, the people will be 'free' to choose between SPDC candidates and candidates that are friendly to the regime. Once again these measures expose the well-orchestrated strategies of the regime and its determination to shape the outcome of the elections.

Parties and candidates that want to compete and represent their constituencies will, therefore, come up with strategies that will not disqualify them prior to voting day.

⁷ Deputy Home Minister arrives in Maungdaw for Election Campaign - <http://www.narinjara.com/details.asp?id=2524>