
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 18

KACHIN PARTY TO REGISTER IN APRIL

The Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) has decided to register to contest the elections, according to party Chairman Tu Ja. The KSPP was formed in March 2009 with the blessing of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The party was officially introduced in July 2009 and has adopted a policy to represent all the people of Kachin State. It plans to prioritize the economic and social development of the region. Tu Ja said he supports the regime's stated goal of creating a "flourishing and disciplined democratic nation" with the participation of multiple political parties. "We have no negative view about the election so far." The party headquarters of the KSPP party is based in Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin State.¹

POLITICAL PARTIES BEGIN TO REGISTER IN NAYPYIDAW

The 88 Generation Students of the Union of Myanmar (88GSUM) and the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF) have become the first two parties to register with the Election Commission. 88GSUM was the first to hand in its application in Naypyidaw and is likely to be headed by Ye Htun, the younger brother of UMNPF Chairman Aye Lwin. The two parties are known to have close ties as they are led by the two brothers. However, 88GSUM is distinct from the original 88 Generation Students led by prominent former students including Min Ko Naing and Ko Ki Gyi, who are in prison. Aye Lwin, a former political prisoner, is known to have close contacts with the regime and has in the past lobbied against western sanctions policy imposed on the SPDC.²

NEW PARTY TO FORM IN ARAKAN STATE

A new Arakan political party, under the name the Union of Myanmar National Force Arakan State Party, has announced it will register to compete in the elections, according to its chairman Aye Kyaing. Since its inception in 2005, the party has been led by Aye Kyaing (Chairman), San Tin as (Vice-Chair), Myint Zaw (Secretary) and Maung Ohn Tin (Joint-Secretary). The party has branch offices in 14 townships including Sittwe, Kyawk Taw and Myauk Oo, out of a total of 17 townships in Rakhine State. In 1990 elections, Aye Kyaing contested as a candidate of the National Unity Party (NUP) a government backed party, but failed to win. The party will be based in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State, which is now being regarded as a key electoral constituency in the forthcoming elections. In the 1990 elections, among the 26 constituencies in Rakhine State, the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) won 11 seats, the National League for Democracy won 9 seats, the National Democratic Party for Human Rights won 4 seats, and the NUP failed to win any.³

MANDALAY RESIDENT SHANS APPROACHED TO RUN FOR JUNTA PARTY

Junta ministers are said to have approached Shan communities in Mandalay, Maymyo (Pyin Oo Lwin), and Mogoke to nominate their own people to contest in Mandalay Regional Legislature elections as representatives of Shan nationalities in Mandalay Division, according to local Shan residents. Junta ministers have met local Shans three times since December 2009 - the most recent with Minister for Health, Dr. Kyaw Myint, in March. The previous two meetings were held between the Shan communities and Minister for Industry (1), U Aung Thaung. Participants said the meetings included prominent Shan elders and community leaders, Shan Civil Society group and Shan

¹ Kachin Party to Register In April - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18094 (Irrawaddy) 22 March 2010.

² Political Parties Begin to Register in Naypyidaw - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18096 (Irrawaddy) 22 March 2010.

³ New Party to form in Arakan State - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18109 (Irrawaddy) 24 March 2010.

Literature and Culture Association. According to rumours circulating in Mandalay, the names of three prominent Shan nationals have come to the fore-front as likely junta-backed candidates:

1. Sai Noom, Vice Chairman of Mandalay Civil Society Group and the owner of AD 1 Hotel and Galone Naga Robe Company,
2. Sai Kyaw Aye Win, the owner of Shwepya Min hostel and a former officer of Namkham Council, and
3. Dr. Sai Kham Lake, well-known Shan composer.

Dr. Sai Kham Lake had been suggested by the regime's Health Minister, Dr. Kyaw Myint, and the two are known to be close friends according to local residents. Sai Lake has not yet responded to the suggestion. Dr. Sai Naw, Chairman of Mogok Shan Literature and Culture Association, is also tipped to be a possible candidate for the Mogok community.⁴

NUP VOWS TO "SERVE THE PEOPLE"

The pro-military junta National Unity Party (NUP) has become the third party to register with the Election Commission to contest the polls scheduled later this year. Previously called the Burma Socialist Programme Party and established by the late dictator General Ne Win, the NUP has vowed to serve the people if elected, according to Han Shwe, member of the party's Central Executive Committee. The party will be led by former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Burma's Armed Forces, Tun Yi, and will have a membership composed of former Ministers, military officials and BSPP party members totalling an estimated 500,000. The party's Central Executive Committee has 23 members including General Secretary Than Tin (former Minister for Mines) and Joint General Secretary Khin Maung Kyi (former Minister of Trade). The party will base its headquarters in Bahan Township in Rangoon Division.⁵

KAREN PARTY APPLIES FOR REGISTRATION

The Kayin People's Party (KPP) led by well-known peace-negotiator Dr. Simon Tha has applied to register as a political party to contest the elections later this year. News of the party's registration was published in the state-run newspaper *New Light of Myanmar* on 1 April. A party member said that after approval, the KPP will launch its campaigns in Irrawaddy, Rangoon, Bago Divisions and Mon State, renowned to be the four most heavily populated Karen regions in Burma. The party is seeking to represent all Karen in Burma and at present has formed a 15-member Committee to oversee its party organisational matters. Dr. Simon Tha, the present Chairman of the KPP, is responsible for having negotiated the peace-talks between the KNU leader General Bo Mya and junta Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in 2004. So far, the KPP has been the only Karen political party to register, with other major Karen cease-fire groups stating their refusal to participate in the junta organised elections.⁶

ETHNIC COUNCIL OPPOSES JUNTA ELECTORAL LAWS

The Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), a coalition of ethnic political and civil society organizations, announced yesterday that the council would not accept the Burma's electoral laws as they were patently one-sided laws drawn by the military junta for itself. The announcement was made after its five-day long meeting held from 27 to 31 March on the Thai-Burma border. The meeting was

⁴ Mandalay Resident Shans approached to run for Junta Party - http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2983:mandalay-resident-shans-approached-to-run-for-junta-party-&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 25 March 2010.

⁵ NUP Vows to 'Serve the People' - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18169 (Irrawaddy) 31 March 2010.

⁶ Karen Party Applies for Registration - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18179 (Irrawaddy) 1 April 2010.

attended by 35 representatives from 7 ethnic states: Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Arakan, Chin, Mon and Shan states. According to the council's resolution, the group opposes the electoral laws, as well as the junta's 2008 constitution which it says is undemocratic and expressed its support to the decision taken by NLD not to re-register as a political party. While harbouring dissatisfaction on one hand, the ENC, however, refrained from opposing or condemning ethnic organizations and individuals planning to contest the elections. The newly elected Chairman Tu Tu Lay urged all state representatives to prevent discord among those who are participating in the elections and those against the elections. The ENC was established in August 2001 as the Ethnic Nationalities Solidarity and Cooperation Committee (ENSCC), and in 2004 became the ENC, representing the seven ethnic states.⁷

NATIONAL POLITICAL ALLIANCE APPLIES FOR REGISTRATION

A Rangoon-based political party, the National Political Alliance (NPA), has applied for party registration to contest in the upcoming election, according to party sources. The NPA is planning to contest the national parliamentary elections and has created a 15-member committee to guide the party and has amassed 100,000 party members and supporters, said party leader Ohn Lwin. NPA leaders including Ohn Lwin, Kyi Win, Thein Kyi and Tin Win will contest seats in Taungdwingyi in Magwe Division, Kyaiklat in Irrawaddy Division and Mingalardon Township and Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township in Rangoon Division.⁸

SHAN VETERAN POLITICIAN TO FORM COALITION WITH 88 GENERATION GROUP

Veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn, leader of the Union Democracy Alliance Party (UDAP), and 88 Generation Student leaders Phyo Min Thein and Thein Tin Aung of the Lodu (People's) Democracy Party (LDP) have agreed in principal to merge their parties to contest the upcoming elections. With a view to further strengthening and gaining wider support, the LDP extended invitations to other opposition parties including U Thu Wai's Democratic Party and the disbanded League for Peace and Democracy party founded by former Prime Minister U Nu to join and form a new political alliance. The UDAP and the LDP are now engaged in discussions on policies and a political agenda. The move is seen as a counter measure against other political forces, namely the 88 Generation Students of the Union of Myanmar (88GSUM) and the Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF) parties.⁹

ANALYSIS

Since the promulgation of the Electoral Laws, political parties have slowly but steadily started registering to contest the polls later this year. Six parties are now registered with the Commission and are awaiting approval to launch their election campaigns. They include:

1. 88 Generation Students of the Union of Myanmar (88GSUM),
2. Union of Myanmar National Political Force (UMNPF),
3. National Unity Party (NUP),
4. Democratic Party (Myanmar),
5. Kayin People's Party (KPP), and
6. National Political Alliances League.

⁷ Ethnic Council Opposed Junta Electoral Laws - http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2988:ethnic-council-opposes-junta-electoral-laws&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 1 April 2010.

⁸ National Political Alliance Applies for Registration - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=18187 (Irrawaddy) 2 April 2010.

⁹ Shan Veteran Politician to form Coalition with 88 Generation Student Group - <http://burmese.dvb.no/textonly/news.php?id=10450> (DVB) 1 April 2010.

The NLD's decision not to register can be considered a set-back for the democratic movement in Burma. But it is one that will be welcomed by the junta.

The present on-going registration by the various ethnic groups as well as student movement parties to contest the elections indicate that although they doubt the outcome, there are parties willing to challenge the SPDC on its own grounds. The SPDC's elections laws have been tailor-made to sideline and intimidate all opposition parties and ethnic nationality groups. In spite of these odds, the new parties should not be dismissed out of hand as being naive or as supporters of the SPDC. Rather, they should be encouraged to continue. What they will or will not be able to achieve is yet to be seen.