
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 47

NO INVITES FOR OUTSIDE ELECTION MONITORS OR JOURNALISTS

According to officials from the Union Election Commission (UEC), more than 3000 candidates will stand for Myanmar's 7 November elections, in which 29 million citizens will be eligible to cast votes. "Forty-two parties have registered for the election but five have been deregistered, and therefore 37 parties will stand for the election," said UEC Chairman U Thein Soe speaking to the media at a press conference held in Nay Pyi Taw on 18 October. During the meeting the UEC chairman explained that of the 3071 candidates who are contesting the elections, 949 are running for Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) seats, 472 for Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) seats, 1508 for State or Region (Pynay or Dae-tha-gyee) Hluttaw seats, and 60 for Nationalities seats, while 82 are independent candidates. Among those running for office, 114 are women. He added that nearly 40,000 polling stations have been designated all over the country and that there are 54 constituencies where only one candidate will run, so voting will not take place in these areas. "On election day, the Election Commission will arrange for foreign diplomats and resident representatives of the UN agencies to observe the voting process. As they are representatives of their respective countries, we don't need to invite others to monitor," he said. U Thein Soe also noted that foreign reporters would not be allowed into Myanmar during the election because "there are already representatives from international media working here", and that "Moreover, the Election Commission will announce the election results in a timely manner". He added that reporters will not be allowed to take photographs or video inside polling stations, in order to prevent disturbances to voters, but journalists will be able to freely document events just outside the polling stations.¹

TWO GENERALS EMBROILED IN ARGUMENT OVER STATE PROPERTY

Two former generals and candidates of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) planning to contest the elections are currently embroiled in a dispute over state owned property. At the center of the issue are Lieutenant-General Thar Aye, former State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) member and USDP candidate for Butalin constituency No. 2, Sagaing Region, and Major-General Khin Maung Myint, current Minister for Construction. According to reports from military officials in Nay Pyi Taw, Thar Aye, who is widely tipped to become Chief Minister for Sagaing Region, took the initiative to confiscate 9 state-owned buildings in Monywa Township. These were being used as residential apartments to house senior civil servants including the local Police Chief as well as the local Medical Superintendent. Initially, Thar Aye had planned to use the buildings to accommodate incumbent local government officials, as well as offices for the new regional government to be established there. The plan back-fired, however, when Khin Maung Myint in his capacity as Minister of Construction reported the matter to the SPDC leadership and in turn Thar Aye was ordered by the higher authorities to return the buildings to their rightful owners. The incident has now sparked uneasiness as well as discontent among the former military leaders who have been forced to retire and to serve as USDP candidates in the elections.²

¹ No invites for outside election monitors or journalists : UEC - <http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/546/news54605.html> (Myanmar Times) 25 October 2010

² Two generals embroiled over state owned-property - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/bur/index.php/news/1-news/4403-2010-10-28-06-47-48> (Irrawaddy) 28 October 2010

RAKHINE STATE ELECTION SUB-COMMISSION CHAIRMAN MEETS MEMBERS OF ELECTION SUB-COMMISSIONS IN SITTWAY

On 14 October, Rakhine State Election Sub-commission Chairman U Aung Mya and Sittway District Election Sub-commission Chairman U Soe Khant accompanied by members of the district election sub-commission and the township election sub-commissions met with members of ward/village-tract election sub commissions, and polling stations in Aungdaing Village-tract and Bumay Village-tract in Sittway Township. Discussions focussed on the electoral process and the location and organizational setup of the polling stations. They also inspected polling stations and provided instructions related to on-going electoral preparations.³

MANDALAY REGION SUB-COMMISSION COORDINATES ELECTORAL PROCESS

On 21 October, the Mandalay Region Sub-commission held a work coordination meeting on the electoral process at its office. Sub-commission Chairman U Aung Htut delivered a speech and dealt with matters related to electoral process, including disaster preparedness measures in case of natural disasters, the distribution of ballot papers district-wise, as well as other practicalities relating to holding the elections under the supervision of members of the sub-commission. The sub-commission members reported on progress in the district, and discussed these with the chairman, who gave concluding remarks.⁴

SHAN STATE ELECTION SUB-COMMISSION MEETS

The Shan State Election Sub-commission held a coordination meeting in Lashio on 26 October 2010. It was attended by State Sub-commission Chairman U Pwint, the Chairmen of Lashio and Kunlong District Sub-commissions and the Chairmen of Hsenwi, Mongyai and Tangyan Township Sub-commissions and other sub-commission members. U Pwint discussed what needed to be done to ensure the successful completion of the general elections, and that state/district/township sub-commissions at their respective locations would be correctly supervised before the elections. U Myint Ko Ko, a State Sub-commission member and Staff officer of the State Immigration and Population Department, explained work being done by members of State sub-commissions in Shan State (north). Chairman U Pwint gave his feedback on the reports, as well a concluding speech.⁵

ELECTORAL WORK CLARIFIED IN KUNGYANGON TOWNSHIP

Kungyangon Township Sub-commission of Yangon Region held a meeting to clarify electoral work for polling station officers at Kungyangon Township on 29 October. Township Sub-commission Chairman U Hla Win discussed the rules and regulations to be followed by sub-commission members. The meeting was attended by over 400 people, including polling station officers and members from ward/ village-tract sub-commissions.⁶

³ Chairman of Rakhine State election sub-commission meets members of election sub-commissions in Sittway - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 October 2010

⁴ Mandalay Region sub-commission coordinates electoral process - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 October 2010

⁵ Shan state election sub-commission meets - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 October 2010.

⁶ Electoral work clarified in Kungyangon township - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-11-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 November 2010

ANALYSIS

With the elections just a week away and parties engaged in last minute voter campaigning, the Union Election Commission (UEC) has quelled and done away with all ideas of election monitoring on 7 November. The election watchdog, however, has taken certain measures to accommodate diplomats as well as representatives of international news agencies who will be given limited access and will be able to witness election-day monitoring. Once again, a cautious approach is being taken by the junta in attempt to counter criticism of its sham elections, while at the same time it is attempting to portray a cooperative attitude.

With measures for the said elections in place and parties gearing up for the polls, the USDP party has witnessed an unwarranted rift between two of its prominent members. Small as it may seem, the Monywa incident is an initial sign of the power struggle commencing within the junta and, if left unattended, could lead to further divisions within the junta hierarchy as well as the USDP leadership. Recent rumours have suggested that many former generals forced retire and run as USDP candidates are unhappy and feel sidelined as well as being let down. This group (with the 25% of military representatives to be appointed by the Commander-in-Chief) will surely prove pivotal in shaping Burma's political scene in the near future.