
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 17

OFFICIAL MEDIA

SECOND MYANMAR-EU HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE HELD IN NAY PYI TAW

The 2nd Myanmar-EU Human Rights Dialogue was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nay Pyi Taw, on 18 June 2015. The event was attended by Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, the EU's Special Representative for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis, Union Minister at the President Office Soe Thane, Aung Min and government officials. The dialogue was co-chaired by Permanent Secretary Aung Lynn of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Kobia. Matters relating to human rights situation and efforts in the EU and Myanmar such as labour and land rights, illegal migration in Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, trainings in prisons, Roma people in the Europe Union States, humanitarian and development efforts in Rakhine State, participation to international core human rights instruments and cooperation in multilateral forum were discussed. Officials from the EU and embassies of Czech Republic, French, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands together with Myanmar officials and experts from Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence, Border Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, Immigration and Population, Health, Labour, Employment and Social Security, Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Office of the Supreme Court of the Union and Union Attorney-General's Office participated in the discussions.¹

OIC SPECIAL ENVOY VISITS MYANMAR

Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin received the Special Envoy of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Syed Hamid Albar on 16 June and discussed Myanmar's position and measures taken in connection with boat people and development programmes in Rakhine state. The OIC Special Envoy said that the discussion helped to better understand the situation on the ground of Myanmar, adding that he would convey the information to the concerned authorities. Syed Albar also expressed willingness to provide without discrimination, development and humanitarian assistance to the people in need through the Myanmar government.²

UEC SEEKS COOPERATION FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPILATION OF VOTERS' LISTS

The Union Election Commission (UEC) urged administrative bodies, political parties, civil society organizations, and voters to cooperate for compilation of correct and complete voters' lists and welcomed all constructive engagements of them, according to a statement dated 19 June released by the commission. As there were weaknesses in voters' lists in 2010 General Election and 2012 by-elections, the commission has started tasks for compilation of voters' lists earlier in the entire country since November, 2014 and voters' lists were announced through 4 phases from April to June, the statement said. Voters' lists were compiled based on family members' lists of the Immigration and National Registration Department, according to the statement. Voters are allowed to apply for inclusion of their names in voters' lists if their names are not stated there with Form-3 while they can reject inappropriate persons in the voters' lists with Form-4 and make corrections with Form-4 (c), the statement said. After such process, the commission has stored the correct information in the main server and will make the voters' lists available online, according to the statement. Speaking to the 2nd Meeting on participation of voters with disabilities on 17 June, Commission Chair Tin Aye said that steps are being taken to help voters with disabilities by building accessible polling stations and printing ballots with Braille lettering for the blind. Tin Aye also stated that electoral rules were amended with the participation of candidates with disabilities. He also stated that international organizations had

¹ Second Myanmar-EU Human Rights Dialogue held in Nay Pyi Taw –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-19.pdf> (GNLM) 19 June 2015 (p. 2)

² OIC Special Envoy visits Myanmar –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-17.pdf> (GNLM) 17 June 2015 (p. 3)

been invited to help the commission in its efforts to include people with disabilities in the electoral process.³

Hluttaw Sessions (Highlights)

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 60th day meeting on 17 June and issues related to the education draft bill was discussed.

- The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session discussed **the pending education amendment bill**. MP Khin Maung Yi said that **the Amyotha Hluttaw's use of terminology for 'scholar' as 'independent scholar' defining the qualities of an independent scholar as academic excellence, neutrality and free will. Academics involved in the writing of the education law were not able to take a neutral stance in the process.** MP Thein Nyunt supported **the amendment made by the Amyotha Hluttaw stressed the need to recognize the role of intellectuals representing students' unions, warning that the denial of their role will be called into question in history.**⁴

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 61st day meeting on 18 June and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- The Pyidaungsu Hluttaaw discussion of the education bill. MP Dr Banyar Aung Moe, Tin Yu and Khin Maung Yi **argued in favour of the Amyotha Hluttaw's proposals for designing curricula applicable to real life in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, expertise and critical thinking.** The Amyotha Hluttaw suggested to abolish the current exam system, saying it encourages rote learning. It has also called for inclusion of vocational training on agriculture and livestock at primary and secondary levels.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

NLD SEEKS HELP FROM CIVIL SOCIETY ON ELECTORAL ROLLS

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has called for an "urgent" scale-up of voter education programs to ensure electoral rolls are accurate at this year's election. During a meeting with civil society groups in Yangon on 17 June, senior party officials urged cooperation to rectify errors on the rolls. It was the first meeting on electoral cooperation between the NLD and the groups, who have been holding regular talks with the Union Election Commission since last year. In late May, the party said its monitoring of electoral rolls on display in 14 Yangon townships indicated that in some areas only 20 percent of voters were correctly listed.

Central Executive Committee member TunTun Hein, said that the results highlighted the important role civil society would play in ensuring rolls are accurate. "We now know clearly that we need help from CSOs and we will discuss how best to cooperate to ensure voters' details are accurate," he said at the gathering held at the Bayda Institute office in Hledan. Tun Tun Hein said the NLD did not have the resources to scrutinise lists within the time allowed during the monitoring of the 14 township lists. "We only had about 14 days to correct the voters' data. That's very little. Also, for the second and final phase there are only seven days for correction of tens of thousands of voters' details," he said.

³ UEC seeks cooperation for successful compilation of voters' lists – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-20.pdf> (GNLM) 20 June 2015 (p. 3)/
UEC takes steps to help voters with disabilities – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-19.pdf> (GNLM) 19 June 2015 (p. 3)

⁴ Unsettled education amendment bill brought before Pyidaungsu Hluttaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 June 2015 (p. 3)

⁵ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues discussions for disputed education amendment bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-06-19.pdf> (GNLM) 19 June 2015 (p. 2)

More voter education programs were needed, he said, noting the low level of public interest. "When we went about urging the public, we found out that the percentage of errors [in the electoral rolls] was remarkably high. We couldn't believe that the accuracy of data was extremely low," said Tun Hein.

UEC officials have admitted that the first phase in Yangon in displaying electoral rolls had received little public attention. NLD Party patron Tin Oo said 2015 was seen as a year of progress for the country. "As we believe this year is a move forward toward democracy, let me request you all to try and cooperate to produce benefits from this movement," he said, urging the CSOs to help. Representatives of civil society organisations yesterday raised their own concerns over the accuracy of the lists and discussed how to cooperate with the NLD in educating voters and scrutinising lists. Hsu Mon Aung of Community Response Group said groups had proposed that the NLD set up channels for information sharing. But she said civil society groups should cooperate with the NLD on campaigning for voter participation but without promoting the party's interests. Asked if she was worried about the rule that observers should remain non-partisan according to their code of conduct, she said cooperation would be limited to voter education and checking electoral rolls, and not extend to helping the party campaign. The NLD and CSOs agreed to hold frequent follow-up meetings on cooperation and information sharing over voter registration.⁶

CSOs FORM ALLIANCE FOR MONITORING, EDUCATION

Fourteen civil society organisations say they have formed a nationwide alliance with the aim of promoting voter education ahead of the November elections, monitoring parliament and recruiting tens of thousands of observers for polling day. "The problem with residents is that they don't really understand the impact of voting as is the case in big cities around the country, even Yangon," said Thant Sin, Executive Director and founding member of the Voter Education Partners Initiative. Although the Union Election Commission (UEC) is engaged in voter education, Thant Sin said its activities were not broad enough. "To be honest, UEC's voter education programs are narrowly focused. Their programs tell voters just to check their names on the voter lists being displayed. But they don't explain why it is important to vote and to be on the lists," he said.

The UEC is rolling out voter registration lists across the country for the public to check their names and data are entered correctly. In the latest phase in 14 Yangon townships, some 87,000 people out of 1.8 million registered voters made formal objections. Thant Sin stressed the important role civil society organisations had played in monitoring elections during the transition to democracy in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. "The emergence of more observers is very important for our country's democratisation," he said. "There are about 80,000 wards and villages around the country. Counting one observer per ward, about 80,000 observers are needed. We will try to set up training processes for at least 50,000 observers for this year's general election," Thant Sin said.⁷

ELECTION FEVER PROMPTS LARGE RISE IN ELECTORAL ROLL COMPLAINTS

After a slow start, complaints are pouring into Yangon Region's election administrators with more than 87,000 people submitting formal objections to voter lists posted in 14 townships.

Voter lists were put up for public viewing in the townships from 25 May to 7 June. Deputy Director of the Regional Electoral Sub-Commission Tin Win, said the number of objections had increased, both in total and as a percentage of eligible voters, compared with the 8700 complaints registered in 10 other Yangon townships that had earlier displayed voters lists. "I think public interest this time has

⁶ NLD seeks help from civil society on electoral rolls –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/15085-nld-seeks-help-from-civil-society-on-electoral-rolls.html>
(Myanmar Times) 18 June 2015

⁷ CSOs form alliance for monitoring, education –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/15069-csos-form-alliance-for-monitoring-education.html>
(Myanmar Times) 17 June 2015

increased. This could be because we are getting closer to the general elections,” Tin Win said yesterday.

The accuracy of voter registration has emerged as one of the most contentious issues so far in the planning for the November elections. The National League for Democracy (NLD) has claimed that up to 80 percent of names on lists were entered incorrectly – such as spelling or date of birth – or not at all. The Union Election Commission (UEC) said this might be the case in individual townships but not across the nation. Out of the more than 87,000 residents who registered formal complaints in the latest Yangon townships to post lists, more than 48,000 requested that their names be added. Some 28,000 requested correction of wrong information, while about 11,000 registered objections to people they considered unsuitable on the lists. The 14 townships include Dagon Seikkan, North Dagon, South Dagon, North Okkalapa, Thingangyun, Thanlyin, Kyauktan, Thongwa, Kayan, Insein, Mingalardon, Shwe Pyi Thar, Hlaing Tharyar and Htantabin.

Because of complaints and requests after the first round, the time of display was extended by sub-commission offices beyond the official hours of 9am to 4pm. More than 1.8 million eligible voters live in the 14 townships, meaning that 4.8pc registered formal objections. The rate in the first 10 townships – which were much smaller, and clustered around downtown – was 4.3pc out of 200,000 eligible voters. The UEC has provided the media with short videos for voter education broadcast on state-owned television and is urging voters to check their names. Min Thu Zin said his Civil and Political Rights Group had observed that public interest in the elections was growing. “For the second step of 14 townships, public interest has grown because the public knows that the elections are drawing nearer,” he said. His group carried out voter education and observation of the posting of lists in Thongwa Township.

Other states and regions started the third step of voter list displays on June 8. Voter lists will be posted in Yangon Region’s final 21 townships on June 22. Election officials in 3 townships of Twante, Kawhmu and Kungyangon said yesterday they would have problems displaying lists on time. “We have completed listing the eligible voters’ names and facts on paper. But we have a little problem. We still don’t have the [International Foundation for Electoral Systems] software in computers to enter names and data of voters,” Khin Maung Cho, chair of the Twante Township Sub-commission. “If we are supplied with software in time, we would be able to display the voters in line with the June 22 deadline,” he said.

Yangon Region Election Sub-commission Chair Ko Ko urged sub-commissions at township levels to cooperate with civil society organisations (CSOs) and inform local authorities, especially police departments, about the voter education process. “Since the voter education process by CSOs might use loudspeakers encouraging voters to check their names, there could be some kind of misunderstanding between them and police. You must inform the police about the education process,” he told sub-commission officials, adding that police could also be asked to provide security for CSOs.⁸

DECEASED COUNTED ON MON STATE’S VOTER-LIST

The announced voter-list of Mon State has included local people who have passed away as eligible voters. “We have found out that the list of voters includes people who have already passed away. I cannot tell you the exact number of those people. We have recorded about ten people included on the voter-list. However, they have now been excluded from the voter-list,” said Nai Nyan, the chairman of election sub-commission of Wakharu Village, Thanbyuzayat Township. Nai Nyan also added that the sub-commission needed to double-check the list which included the deceased, and as

⁸ Election fever prompts large rise in electoral roll complaints –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/15045-election-fever-prompts-large-rise-in-electoral-roll-complaints.html> (Myanmar Times) 16 June 2015

the Union Election Commission (UEC) stated in its methods/instructions, the sub-commission would go ahead and implement the process [of voters]. Also, those who are not on the voter-list yet could apply for voter status.

According to the ward/village election sub-commission, the voter-list will be reconstituted to avoid errors in data such as inclusion of the deceased. Furthermore, valid voters originally omitted from the list will be added. "For our ward, the people who have already passed away are not included. This is because when someone dies, we have to report this to the [ward] office. So, we already excluded those dead people from the list," said Cho Win, Secretary of Thanbyuzayat Town's ward election sub-commission. He added that after the family members of the deceased in Thanbyuzayat Town informed the respective administration office, only then would the local civil development group send that dead body away for incineration. Therefore, there is a minor number of deceased residents. And, there could be some mistakes on the voter list.

"The reason that the deceased are still on the voter-list is that although family members inform the people at the office of their passing, they do not erase the names from Form 10 of the household document, the names of the deceased are still there and listed as voters," said a resident from Thanbyuzayat Township. Everyone can object to ineligible voters [the election commission] if they have the supporting [to prove] documents and have completed Form 4. Anyone whose name is not on the voter-list can apply to be included with Form 3. If the applicants have submitted incorrect information, they can then re-apply with Form 4-8, according to posters and pamphlets distributed as educational information for vote casting in the upcoming national election. "They came to check whether our names and ID cards were correct and, ultimately, if we have been issued ID cards. This is because they are concerned that the opportunity to cast votes will be missed. And our country is still moving towards reforms. We would like our people to participate in this process of reform," said a resident in Thanbyuzayat. Still, errors are on the voter-list data in some villages and in other townships of Mon State.

According to Mon State Election Sub-commission, as stated on the eligible voter-list, of 10 townships, in Mon State, Moulmein Township has the most eligible voters, while Kyaik Hto has the least eligible voters. There are more than 1,400,000 eligible voters in Mon State.⁹

MON WOMEN'S PARTY SEEKING REGISTRATION

After changing their name to comply with the demands of the Union Election Commission (UEC), the Women's Party (Mon) on 16 June submitted their application to stand in the 2015 election. The party is looking to compete in 3 administrative regions, pending UEC approval. The Women's Party (Mon) first issued their submission to the UEC requesting party formation in October 2014 under the name Women's Party, but were told that the title was too broad. After the name change, the party had its formation approved on 28 May and applied to register for the upcoming elections on 16 June.

Mi Than Shin, the leader of the Mon State-based party (also known as Mi Layaing Mon) said the party hopes to run for election in areas with sizable ethnic Mon populations: Mon State, Pegu Division and Tenasserim Division. "We are looking to field 2 candidates in Mon populated constituencies in Pegu and around three in Tenasserim," said Mi Than Shin. She added that there are over 60 Central Committee members in Mon, Tenasserim and Pegu, and that the party will liaise with the two major Mon parties – Mon National Party and All-Mon Regions Democracy Party – with regards to the fielding of candidates in Mon State. "Our policy is to work together with every party that looks to promote women's rights. We also support the democratic reforms favoured by many other parties," said Mi Than Shin. "As we are women's party, we are open to working with anyone who wants to promote

⁹ Deceased counted on Mon State's voter-list – <http://monnews.org/2015/06/13/deceased-counted-on-mon-states-voter-list/> (IMNA) 13 June 2015

the role of women in politics,” she said, adding that as the first women’s party they are open to alliances with similar groups in other regions, as and when they are formed.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

Complaints of electoral roll call errors by the Union Election Commission (UEC) in recent weeks is a sign that the upcoming elections in November has indeed drawn the interest of many people in Myanmar. The large number of formal objections to voter lists posted in Rangoon Region as well as the inclusion of deceased in voter lists in Mon State has been brought to the attention of the authorities not only shows that such irregular practices will not be accepted but more importantly reflecting a stark contrast from practices of the past. The UEC on its part has initiated steps and measures in election administration since the flawed elections in 2010. The consultative approach adopted including consultation with civil society and international electoral support organisations on the regulatory framework; invitations to international electoral observers as well as to domestic observers would suggest that it is keen and committed to delivering credible polls results. The upcoming months ahead will be a time of considerable uncertainty and possible tension coupled with a fragile peace process which remains as one of the major challenges to the successful holding of the elections. And the most probable and important factor is that the outcome of the elections is accepted by the military (Tatmadaw).

¹⁰ ELECTION 2015: Women’s Party (Mon) seeking registration – <http://www.dvb.no/news/election-2015-womens-party-mon-allowed-to-form-seeking-registration-burma-myanmar/52668> (DVB) 17 June 2015