

ELECTION MONITOR NO. 6

BURMESE TYCOON TAY ZA TO CONTEST ELECTION FROM PUTA-O

Burmese tycoon Tay Za, a close associate of the military junta, is planning to contest from Puta-O Township in Kachin State in the upcoming 2010 elections, according to local sources. Tay Za a businessman of Bamar origin, has already been named by the SPDC to take the post of the as the highest administrator's position for Puta-O Township after next year's elections, local residents said. Tay Za's control of business interests in the Puta-O district provides him with the opportunity to lobby local residents for support to his campaign. Tay Za also owns Air Bagan, the main airline for locals and tourists for domestic travel. Puta-O is mainly populated by ethnic Shans and Kachin.

USDA AIMS TO RECRUIT MORE STUDENTS AND RESIDENTS IN MUDON TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

Recently, members of the Mon State's Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) arrived in Mudon Township to hold a meeting with 20 key area USDA members, Mon youths, and members of the Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC). At the meeting area USDA members were ordered to recruit more than 200 residents in each village to become members of the USDA in Mudon Township. The USDA members that arrived in Mudon Township to head the meeting included former Malawmyine University professor U San Thit, the Mawlamyine Executive committee [MEC] Joint Secretary U Thein Lwin, MEC member U Zaw Moe Lwin and others high ranking USDA members. In the meeting U San Thit ordered Mudon Township USDA organizers to take responsibility to organize more members in the surrounding villages. In each village organizers are expected to persuade educated residents and students who study in middle and high school to join and participate in the USDA. If organized to join, members would be expected to vote for USDA candidates in the coming 2010 elections.

According to a local resident, the USDA's plans are to recruit students and educate residents before the up-coming elections and to involve them in their activities. In addition, they also mentioned that the elections are being implemented democratically and that the support of the all local residents was vital. It's clear that they are collecting 200 more people to get them involved in their preparation for an election role. "Most of the students are already USDA members. They already have been given USDA registration forms in the school. They will also use students to organize rural residents to work for their election," a middle school teacher from Mudon commented, "We can prove this because they have also used students to fill out forms and have allowed them to organize rural and illiterate residents in the 2008 Referendum."

RIOT POLICE DEPLOYED BEFORE 2010 ELECTIONS

Scores of police from Central Burma have been transferred to Rangoon and Mandalay in an alleged attempt to contain possible protests before elections next year. Police sources have said that since October at least 74 people from 10 townships in Bago Division have been deployed to Police Battalions, the term the government coined for Riot Police following the 1988 uprising. According to an officer included in the transfer, the highest ranking officer to be moved was that of inspector. The reasons for the transfer of so many police to police battalions had not been disclosed according to the officer. Locals close to the police said those who have been relocated are not satisfied with the move for a number of reasons. Riot Police were key players in the bloody crackdown on the 1988 uprising in Burma in which around 3,000 protestors were killed. The military regime changed the name of Riot Police force into Police Battalion. Sources at the Myanmar Police Force agreed that the transfer might have been carried out to prepare for possible protests in the run-up to the elections.

NDA-K CHANGES TO BURMA'S BORDER GUARD FORCE (BGF)

The ethnic Kachin rebel armed group the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) officially converted its forces to the Burmese Army-controlled Border Guard Force at a ceremony held on 8 November at the NDA-K base in Pangwah east of Kachin State near the Sino-Burma border.

Under the new arrangement, the military bases for the new BGF Battalions remain unchanged. They will be the former NDA-K Battalions such as No.1001 in Chipwi, No. 1002 at Lupi in Pangwah and No. 1003 Sinkyak in Kimbait according to NDA-K officials. The junta's BGF module dictates that all the BGF Battalions be commanded by new officers less than 50 years of age. About 100 NDA-K military personnel, who are already over 50, have retired and they will receive monthly pension from the junta. The ceremony was attended by the NDA-K leaders Zahkung Ting Ying and two high ranking officials from the junta- Maj-Gen. Soe Win, Commander of the Northern Regional Command base in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, and Deputy Defense Minister Maj-Gen.Aye Myint from Napyidaw. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) troops led by Zahkung Ting Ying and Ze Lum split from the mother organization in 1968 and joined the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) for 21 years as Army Division No.101. The name NDA-K came after the split following the collapse of the CPD in 1989. Soon after, it signed a permanent ceasefire agreement with the SPDC on December 15 1989. Former NDA-K leader Zahkung Ting Ying and retired officers are planning to contest the junta-conducted 2010 elections through the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) led by retired Kachin Independence Organizations (KIO)'s Vice-President No.2 Dr.Manam Ta Ja, said retired NDA-K officers.

ANALYSIS

The move to install Tay Za as its candidate for Puta-O region, is further evidence of the seriousness and intent of the regime as it prepares itself for the upcoming 2010 Elections. The junta's plan to secure control throughout the country by gaining a majority vote would be a certainty in Puta-O due to Tay Za's business investments and close ties to the local leaders. The USDA continues its strategy of lobbying in towns and villages throughout the country to gain support in accordance to plans laid down by the regime and as the elections draw closer more activities campaigns can be expected. The populations in the rural areas and smaller towns can expect to see more USDA campaigns in the coming months. The junta is taking nothing for granted, and, as such, the deployment of Police Battalions to Rangoon and Mandalay can be regarded as precautionary measures to eliminate disturbances which they would consider detrimental to the elections. In a nutshell, nomination of candidates and lobbying campaigns together with security measures implemented by the regime indicates the importance of the 2010 elections for the SPDC.

As part of the SPDC's overall strategy, the recent transformation of the NDA-K Forces into Border Guard Forces will be seen by the military as a positive step towards its plan to convert ceasefire groups. The ability of the junta to enforce its might on smaller ceasefire groups to surrender will be regarded by the military as an achievement, however the real test remains to be seen in handling the larger and more powerful ceasefire groups. The outcome of the transformation of these groups into the BGF could prove to be fatal especially for the ceasefire groups, and according to some analysts, the SPDC is already drawing up plans for the total elimination of these groups as a last resource in the absence of an agreement. This scenario would not be in the interest of all parties involved and should be avoided at all costs.