
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 4

MONGLA CEASE-FIRE GROUP AGREES TO BECOME MILITIA

The National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS), the ethnic group commonly known as the Mongla group, has agreed in principle to the junta's "one country, one military" proposal. A Mongla delegation led by its leader Sai Leun (U Saing Lin) met with junta chief negotiator Lt-Gen Ye Myint of Military Affairs Security (MAS) in Kengtung, Eastern Shan State recently. The Mongla group is reported to have agreed to place its 4,500-strong armed forces under the SPDC's control on a step-by-step basis, provided some conditions are met.

WA CEASEFIRE GROUP AGREES TO BORDER GUARD FORCE

Similarly, a five-man delegation from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) met with the North-Eastern Regional Commander, Major-General Aung Than Htut, during the last weekend in October to discuss the proposed Border Guard Force programme. At the meeting, the Wa made clear that the withdrawal of Burmese army units from Wa territory was a first priority and requirement.

RAMANYA FACTION OF NMSP AGREES TO BGF

Naing Shaung, a former Battalion Commander of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and leader of the breakaway faction, Yamanya, also met with South-East Regional Commander Lt.Gen. Thet Naing Win, to discuss the transformation and creation of a People's Militia or BGF. According to sources, Naing Shaung recently laid down his arms to the authorities, with the aim of accepting the SPDC's Border Guard Forces proposal. Following the defection, the NMSP, issued a statement requesting Naing Shaung to rejoin the NMSP, stating that his actions were jeopardizing the Mon national cause.

NMSP PREPARES TO OPPOSE THE 2010 ELECTIONS IN MON STATE.

Reports have surfaced that New Mon State Party (NMSP) Chairman Nai Htaw Mon, as well as NMSP Central Executive Committee members, Nai Hong Sar and Nai Htar Wara, have been traversing Mon State and NMSP territory since mid-September 2009 organizing Mon communities in Burma in preparation for the 2010 elections.

The NMSP organizing committee is explaining the most important elements of the NMSP agenda, and what they have achieved to date and what they are planning to do for the future” said an NMSP officer based in Thailand.

Members of the NMSP Central Executive Committee have been holding lectures to discuss the NMSP’s political positions including the party’s decision not to accept the SPDC’s Border Guard Force offer as well as the 2010 Elections.

ZOMI PARTY WILL PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS IF CONSTITUTION AMENDED

In a statement issued to celebrate its 21st Anniversary, the Zomi National Congress stated that it will participate in the upcoming 2010 Elections, only if amendments are made to the 2008 Constitution. During the 1990 multi-party elections, the Zomi National Congress, contested in Tiddim I, Tiddim II, Tonzang and Kalaymyo II constituencies and won two seats.

BURMESE MEDIA ACTIVISTS AND RELIEF WORKERS ARRESTED

Around 20 journalists and relief workers have been arrested in the past month while many others have gone into hiding according to Rangoon-based news journals. In recent weeks, government authorities have been targeting relief workers and journalists involved with the Lin Latt Kyae (Shining Star) relief programme for Cyclone Nargis victims. Those arrested include Paing Soe Oo, Thant Zin Soe, Ka Gyi, Zaw Gyi, Lai Ron, Shwe Moe and Aung Myat Kyaw Thu. A wider investigation by the government into post-cyclone relief work appears to be underway, with people involved in unofficial financial brokering also being called in for interrogation.

NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY (NLD) RE-CIRCULATES DISCIPLINARY REGULATION

Party Disciplinary Regulations were re-issued by the NLD Party recently when 25 organizational committees from NLD Mandalay, Bago (Pegu), and Rangoon decided to take matters into their own hands by giving interviews to exile-based Burmese media groups calling for the convening of an All Burma Party Congress related to the upcoming 2010 Elections. The activities of the organizational committees were deemed as violations, including dissent on the party’s stand and policy matters. In a statement issued by the NLD Central Information Department, the reissuance of the disciplinary regulation was made in keeping with the resolution passed in the Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting held on 26 October which was based on suggestions given by party Chairman Aung Shwe.

According to Ohn Kyaing, a member of the NLD Central Information Department, the regulation was first issued on 13 May 2003, in which it states that party members at the State and Divisional level can talk to the media in exile only about local activities and local affairs. The

township level can talk about local activities but they cannot voice opinion on party policy affairs. It further states that party members must avoid activities which can undermine unity and political objectives of the party, avoid misusing intra-party democracy for the sake of their vested interests which can create sectarianism and factionalism in the party, avoid conducting organizational work in other areas apart from their own States and Divisions, talking to exile-based media should not undermine the party policy.

In a further statement, the NLD CEC issued a Special Announcement regarding the convening of a party congress on 22 October 2009 in which it stated, the CEC is aware of the necessity to reconstitute and reorganize the CEC and the Central Committee of the party and this issue will be discussed and decided when the CEC meets Party General Secretary Daw Aung San Suu Kyi or take necessary actions and resolutions when the Political Parties Registration Law is enacted and promulgated by the junta.

ANALYSIS

The decision by the Mongla and Wa groups seem to have averted a return to armed struggle. The 31 October 2009 deadline to transform either into a Border Guard Force or a militia has passed and negotiations between the SPDC and the ceasefire groups seem to be progressing.

Meanwhile, the New Mon State Party and the Zomi National Congress seem to be gearing up to oppose the elections. Whether the SPDC will move militarily against the NMSP, which is a ceasefire group, remains to be seen. The proximity of the NMSP territory to Thailand and the Karen National Union (a non-ceasefire group) may give the SPDC second thoughts.

The NLD, like modern political parties today, seems to be having a difficult time controlling its media exposure. Given SPDC restrictions the task is not easy.

The arrest of relief workers and media activists seem to be part of the SPDC's plan to clear the decks before the elections. More restrictions on relief workers in the delta and international NGOs can be expected in the near future.