

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 26

OFFICIAL MEDIA

GOVERNMENT AND 8 EAOs SIGN NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The Government and eight Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) on 15 October signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which was officially witnessed by officials from the United Nations, the European Union (EU), China, India, Thailand and Japan. The agreement was signed by President Thein Sein, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, Vice President Nyan Tun, Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw Khin Aung Myint, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Vice-Senior-General Soe Win, Chairman of Karen National Union-KNU Saw Mutu Say Poe, Chief of Staff of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army-DKBA Saw Lah Bwe, Chairman of Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council Saw Htay Maung, Chairman of Chin National Front-CNF Pu Nang Lian Thang, Patron of Pa-O National Liberation Organization-PNLO U Khun Okka, PNLO Chair Hkun Myint Tun, Chairman of All Burma Students' Democratic Front-ABSDF Yebaw Than Ge, Vice Chairman of Arakan Liberation Party Khaing Soe Naing Aung and Chairman of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS/Shan State Army- South (SSA-S) U Yawd Serk.

Before the signing, President Thein Sein delivered a speech in which he welcomed the signing of the NCA as historic and significant day and that the road to future to peace had been established. The President also added that sustainable and lasting could not be achieved by ceasefires alone and that political dialogue is required to address deep-rooted issues in the country. He stated efforts to bring the remaining organisations into the process would continue and that the door is open to them. In conclusion President Thein Sein, said that the signing of the NCA represented the mutual trust between the government and EAOs and would become a legacy for future generations. On behalf of the EAOs, Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman Saw Mutu Say Poe said: the NCA was achieved due to unity and trust between the negotiators, a desire to compromise, collectively solve issues, and find answers to political issues through negotiations rather than force of arms. More than just a ceasefire agreement, the NCA is the first step on the important road towards the establishment of a federal and democratic Union and to overcome these obstacles and that many challenges remained. The KNU Chairman also reiterated the need to avoid only favouring one's views, and to act in the spirit of mutual respect and national reconciliation to achieve positive outcomes for the peace process through an inclusive political dialogue. Union Minister Aung Min and Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win read out excerpts from the agreement and exchanged copies of the signed NCA. Following the signing ceremony, the government and EAOs convened the Joint Implementating Coordination Meeting (JICM) which according to the NCA had to be convened within 14 days of the signing. At the meeting, President Thein Sein pledged the government would follow the points agreed in the NCA and extended the olive branch to those who have not yet signed the NCA. Subsequently, the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) and the Union Peace Dialogues Joint Committee (UPDJC) to facilitate the political dialogue, were formed on 16 October. According to the NCA, these two committee had to be formed within 30 days of the signing.¹

8 GROUPS REMOVED FROM UNLAWFUL ORGANISATION LIST

According to an announcement signed by Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Ko on 12 October, President Thein Sein removed the Kayin National Union (KNU), the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS)/Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) from the list of Unlawful Association. Similarly, in a separate statement issued on 13 October, another 5

¹ President extends olive branch to those who haven't signed - Peace deal signed –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 October 2015 (p.1, 2 & 3)

Ethnic Armed Organisations including, the Karen National Liberation Army-PeaceCouncil-KNLA-PC, Chin National Front-CNF, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army-DKBA, Pa-O National Liberation Organisation- PNLO and Arakan Liberation Party- ALP were also removed from the list under the Unlawful Association Act.²

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS WILL PRIORITISE AREAS UNDER CEASEFIRE

Development priorities will be given to areas where the ceasefire accord is in place, said Minister Aung Min at a press conference after the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signing ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw on 15 October. The government will provide funds for development, with assistance from international donors, as stipulated in the (NCA). Of the 15 ethnic armed groups invited by the government to ink the truce pact, 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) agreed to do so. During the ceremony, both sides expressed the view that the signing was a first step in the right direction for achieving lasting peace in Myanmar. Minister Aung Min insisted that development projects will also be implemented in areas inhabited by groups who did not sign the ceasefire, provided permission to do so is given by the groups. "They will not be sidelined because we are brothers living in this country. But it is up to them to determine whether or not to allow development works." Top priorities include demining, providing food and shelter, creating jobs and providing assistance to those who wish to return home after having fled earlier conflicts, the Minister said. The government, ethnic groups and donors will work together to implement development projects in areas affected by conflict, he added. "Following the tripartite group's decision, donors will manage the aid themselves, without any interference from the government." The government will provide suggestions for possible projects, with the initial capital invested by the government.³

UNION ELECTION COMMISSION MAKES A U-TURN

After touting the idea of delaying Myanmar's much-anticipated general elections due to disruptions caused by flooding and landslides, the Union Election Commission (UEC) announced on 13 October that it will be held on November 8 as scheduled. A statement issued by the commission said that it took into account the views expressed by representatives from 7 political parties during a meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw on 13 October to discuss a possible postponement." The UEC reviewed the opinions put forth by a number of political parties and has decided to go ahead with the election on 8 November. The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) supported the idea of postponing the election – for an unspecified period – on the grounds that natural disasters have prevented candidates from campaigning in certain areas; in particular Shan and Kachin states. The National League for Democracy (NLD) disagreed, saying that the impact of the flooding was not an insurmountable obstacle to holding an election. Floods hit 12 of the country's 14 states and regions in July through to September, killing 132 people and affecting an estimated 1.6 million people – the equivalent of almost half a million families, the UEC said. The floods were the worst natural disaster to occur in Myanmar since Cyclone Nargis killed nearly 140,000 people in May 2008. The UEC Chairman cited a meeting back on 21 July this year when members of the National League for Democracy Party, Myanmar Farmers' Development Party and Guiding Star Party had proposed the election be delayed due to errors in voters' lists. During the same meeting, a representative from Chin Progressive Party had suggested the election be postponed because of difficulties of campaigning in areas hit by floods and landslides, he said. The UEC Chairman also urged those present at the meeting to consider a lack of peace and stability in some areas, saying that political parties were prevented

² KNU, ABSDF, RCSS/SSA-S removed from list of unlawful associations –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 October 2015 (p. 1)/
Five more ethnic groups removed from unlawful list –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 October 2015 (p. 2)

³ Development projects will prioritise areas under ceasefire –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 October 2015 (p. 1)

from carrying out effective campaigning in certain areas of Shan State, Kachin State and the Palaung Self-administered Zone. A representative from the National Unity Party agreed that the election should be postponed, citing “social chaos” and natural disasters. The National Democratic Force reportedly questioned whether postponing the election would adversely impact the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, which is scheduled to be signed on 15 October. Myanmar Farmers’ Development Party supported the postponement of the election, while Arakan National Party urged the UEC to determine whether a delay would impact the situation of Internally Displaced People in Rakhine State. The party suggested that the postponement of the election should be nationwide, not be region-wise, if it were to be delayed. A number of international election observers, including those from the European Union, have already arrived in Myanmar and will publish reports shortly after the polls, while both local and foreign investors are watching keenly. The UEC also announced on 12 October the areas where elections would not be held. In its statement the Election Commission stated that 212 village-tracts in Kachin State, 94 village-tracts in Kayin State, 41 village-tracts in Bago Region, one village-tract in Mon State and 5 townships and 56 village-tracts in Shan State would not be holding the elections. Areas where elections are cancelled are also posted on the website of the UEC at www.Uecmyanmar.org.⁴

EU ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION DEPLOYS 30 LONG-TERM OBSERVERS

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) to Myanmar deployed 30 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) throughout the country on 11 October. The group is the second contingent, following the core team, which arrived in Myanmar on 26 September. “The LTOs will cover all states, regions and territories in both, urban and rural areas. They will observe the entire electoral process prior, during and after the general election scheduled for 8 November. The observers will be meeting electoral officials, candidates and representatives from political parties, civil society and the media” explained Deputy Chief Observer Mark Stevens. Prior to their deployment the LTOs received a three-day in depth briefing in Yangon on the electoral background and political environment and other topics. 62 Short-Term Observers and a Delegation of the European Parliament will join the LTOs shortly before the election. Together with EU diplomats the EOM will in total deploy on Election Day about 150 Observers from all 28 member states as well as Norway, Switzerland and Canada. The EU EOM is led by Chief Observer Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, a Vice President of the European Parliament from Germany. “The EU EOM conducted a comprehensive analysis of the electoral process based on a methodology developed by the EU over many years. The EU EOM is impartial and does not interfere in the electoral process”, said Mark Stevens. “The EU EOM’s analysis includes aspects such as the legal framework, the work of the election administration, the campaign activities of the candidates and political parties, the conduct of the media, the voting, counting and the tabulation of results, the resolution of election related disputes,” elaborated the Deputy Chief Observer further. The EU EOM will issue a preliminary statement shortly after the elections. A final report —with technical recommendations for future elections — will be published later.⁵

UNSG ADVISER MEETS MYANMAR MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS

The Union Election Commission (UEC) will make every effort to ensure that the general elections on 8 November are free and fair, its chairman told the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Vijay Nambiar. Issues related to security measures, the postponement of elections in some areas, local and foreign election observers, fair and balanced media coverage and ways to avoid

⁴ Union Election Commission makes a U-turn –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 October 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
Elections cancelled in some village-tracts –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2015 (p. 2)

⁵ EU election observation Mission deploys 30 long-term observers –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 October 2015 (p. 1)

the politicisation of religion by political parties were discussed. The Election Commission Chairman Tin Aye also said that arrangements have been made allow local and foreign observers to have access to the polls and inviting the election commissions from ASEAN member states. The Special Adviser also held meetings with Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and discussed cooperation between Myanmar the United Nations as well as legislative issues, the nationwide ceasefire accord, human rights and measures to be taken before, during and after the 8 November election to ensure that it is free and fair.⁶

EU MEMBER STATES WELCOMES MYANMAR'S RATIFICATION ON THE PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The heads of missions of the European Union accredited to Myanmar warmly welcomed the ratification, on 28 September 2015, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This ratification reinforces the global trend towards eliminating the recruitment of children into armed forces. Children affected by armed conflict remain among the top human rights priorities of the European Union (EU). Armed conflicts still affect a great number of children and pose a serious threat to their survival, development and life opportunities. The ratification of the optional Protocol is an important step. The European Union encourages the Government of Myanmar to further improve the promotion and protection of human rights in the country. The EU stands ready to offer support in implementing the optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.⁷

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

OVER 6,000 VALID VOTERS IN KYAUNG YWA VILLAGE-TRACK, EASTERN YE TSP

More than 6,000 people are eligible to vote in 2015 elections, in Kyaung Ywa Village-track, in eastern Ye Township, Mon State, according to Ye Township Election Sub-commission. It was previously reported that the villages, including Kan-nee, Wa-paing, Wa-Zin, and Kanee, in eastern Ye Township and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) controlled area, would not allowed to vote in the polls but Ye Township Election Sub-commission has stated that these villages will now be able to cast votes in the upcoming election. Ye Township Election Sub-commission also stated that there are 6118 eligible voters in these villages and that the voter-list was announced from 14 to 17 September. An estimated 1, 470,000 voters have been registered as eligible voters according to Mon State Election Sub-commission.⁸

CANDIDATES RUSH FOR ETHNIC AFFAIRS MINISTER POSITIONS IN KAYIN STATE

A total of 27 candidates from 12 parties along with several independent candidates, will run in Kayin State seeking to become one of 3 Ethnic Affairs Ministers for the state, according to statistics provided by the state's election commission on 3 October. In Karen State there are ethnic affairs ministers representing the Mon, Bamar and PaO communities. The list includes 7 independent candidates and three candidates from the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), 3 candidates from the National League for Democracy (NLD), 3 candidates from the Phlone-Sawaw Democratic Party

⁶ UEC chairman, Union FM meet special adviser to UNSG –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 October 2015 (p. 2)/
Speaker, UN adviser discuss upcoming elections –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 October 2015 (p.3)

⁷ Local Statement of the European Union and European Union Member State Embassies Accredited to Myanmar –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-03-red.pdf> (GNLM) 3 October 2015 (p.5)

⁸ Over 6,000 valid voters in Kyaung Ywa Village-track, eastern Ye Tsp –
<http://monnews.org/2015/10/04/over-6000-valid-voters-in-kyaung-ywa-village-track-eastern-ye-tsp/> (IMNA) 4 October 2015

(PSDP) and 3 candidates from other parties. “Our party will run for Mon, Pa-O, and Bamar [Affairs positions] and Karen Affairs [Minister position] in Mon State. Based on our party’s principles, they will carry out the ethnic people’s goals and make plans to fulfill their needs,” said Phlone-Sawaw Democratic Party’s Vice-Chairman Mann Aung Pyi Soe.⁹

MANDALAY ELECTION OFFICIALS SNOWED IN WITH VOTER LIST CORRECTIONS

Electoral officials in Mandalay Region are struggling to process requests for voter’s list additions from more than 70,000 people who have complained that their names have been omitted. Regional Election Commission Deputy Director Kyaw Soe said Mandalay Region had received the largest number of these Form 3 applicants. More than 26,000 of the would-be voters are in Mandalay District, the largest number, with only about 1600 voters applying for inclusion in Nyaung Oo. “The time allowed for reviewing and amending the list is over in Mandalay Region, though the period has been extended for some villages in Myingyan because of the flooding,” he added. The details of more than 77,000 voters were amended following their complaints, and the names of 15,000 people were removed from the list when they were found to be deceased, the local election commission said. The voter rolls were publicly displayed twice for checking and corrections, once in June and once at the end of August until 8 September. The published lists sparked controversy for the slew of errors, duplication and omissions, with the National League for Democracy alleging that between 30 and 80 percent of the list was incorrect. The UEC is expected to issue the final, un-amendable voter rolls shortly before the November 8 election. The commission has also promised voters who can prove their identity on Election Day will not miss the chance to cast a ballot, whether or not they are on the list. There are an estimated 4,170,000 eligible voters in Mandalay Region.¹⁰

KACHIN CANDIDATES GRAPPLE WITH UNSTABLE ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE

Campaigning is gathering pace across Myanmar, but candidates in Kachin State are facing a particularly challenging electoral landscape dominated by war, inter-ethnic tensions and the involvement of militia groups. With less than 4 weeks to go before the election scheduled for November 8, some candidates in Kachin have not even started campaigning. This is particularly the case in some areas of Myitkyina, Mohnyin and Bhamo Townships, mainly because of clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and general insecurity. “Our candidates were going to contest Mansi and Sumprabum Townships, but we can’t do anything,” said Moe Myint Aung, a campaign leader for the Kachin Democratic Party (KDP). “The local authorities banned us from campaigning because of insecurity,” he added. The KDP believe they would not face any serious problem if they went there, “because we are the same ethnicity and they will not cause us any trouble. We want to go there as much as we can, but now many areas have been restricted, even whole constituencies,” said Moe Myint Aung.

Mansi, in the eastern part of the state close to China, has been the scene of fighting since a 17-year-old peace deal collapsed in 2011. Since late September clashes have occurred in villages in Mansi and Tanai Townships as the nationwide ceasefire accord deadline neared. In early October, clashes occurred in Hpakant Township, forcing the cancellation of campaigning there. Armed conflict persists in villages, out in the countryside. “The local authorities say we can go if we want, but they can’t guarantee security,” said Win Aung, the National League for Democracy candidate for the Pyithu Hluttaw seat in Momauk Township. However, some party leaders say the restrictions on campaigning do not seem to apply to candidates from the Union Solidarity and Development Party in Tanai and

⁹ Candidates rush for ethnic affairs minister positions in Kayin State – <http://mizzima.com/news-election-2015-election-news/candidates-rush-ethnic-affairs-minister-positions-kayin-state> (Mizzima) 5 October 2015

¹⁰ Mandalay election officials snowed in with voter list corrections – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16817-mandalay-election-officials-snowed-in-with-voter-list-corrections.html> (Myanmar Times) 5 October 2015

Sumprabum. Candidates fret that their campaigns will never get off the ground in time. Speaking before the UEC listed all the village tracts where voting would not go ahead, the candidates expressed their fears that the election would be cancelled in some areas if fighting persisted. Some also believe fighting has intensified since the KIA refused to sign the national ceasefire agreement, despite a strong push from President Thein Sein, and that the fighting could be a cover for electoral fraud. "We are seriously concerned about the recent fighting. The government can shut down polling stations in villages in conflict areas," said Manam Tu Jar, head of Kachin State Democracy Party. "Under these circumstances, the election would not be free and fair. That's why I asked Election Chair Tin Aye to stop the fighting in Kachin State," he added. "The government will allow polling to proceed in constituencies they think they can win, but they create problems in constituencies they could lose," said the NLD's Daw Bauk Jar. "I'm not expecting too much from this election."

According to the Kachin State election sub-commission, 823 polling stations will be set up by November, fewer than the 866 established in 2010. On 13 October, the UEC announced that voting had been cancelled in nearly 600 village tracts nationwide, because lack of security would not allow for free and fair elections. The figure included 211 village tracts in 11 Kachin State townships, compared with 68 village tracts cancelled in 2010. Other sources of conflict are the presence of militias and ethnic tensions.

Sources from the Kachin State police stated that 991 officers will ensure security in the 823 polling stations. In addition, special police and Tatmadaw soldiers will be brought into ensure security in areas considered too dangerous for polling to take place. Though most were selected on the recommendation of the local authorities, 105 special police officers are militia members. "Militiamen will ensure security in Kaunglanhpu and Nagmung Townships in Putao District and Chipwi and Waingmaw Townships in Myitkyina District," said Police Major Aung Myint Naing. They are two people's militia groups, known as Pyi Thu Sit, in Kachin State include the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K), led by Zakhung Ting Ying, a sitting MP from the state. The other is the Lasang Awng Wa group based in Lawa Yang, 32 kilometres (20 miles) north of Myitkyina, in Waingmaw Township. The Lasang Awng Wa group is mainly associated with business, but Zakhung Ting Ying is contesting the election and has been warned by the UEC to halt campaigning in three areas in his constituency. "If anything happens on Election Day because of the people's militias, whoever decided to deploy them will be responsible. I don't understand why the government is using these forces," said Daw Bauk Jar. NDF candidates are going to contest seats in NDA-K controlled areas, she added. Pol Maj Aung Myint Naing dismissed such concerns, saying special police were unarmed. "Zakhung Ting Ying has banned other parties from campaigning in his constituency and the UEC has issued a warning against him. We are ready to take action against him under the law in the event of a complaint from a party or the UEC if his forces disturb the election," he said.

Special measures may be required for 65 polling stations on the fringes of KIA-held zones, the police say. "In addition to the security situation, communications and transportation are bad. We will face difficulties getting the ballot boxes past KIA-controlled areas. We could either announce the results in those stations a week late, or arrange an advance vote," said Aung Myint Naing. Police estimate racial conflict could be an issue in 24 townships. Tension has been reported between Kachin and Shan ethnic groups over a group known as "Patjasan", an informal anti-narcotics squad organised two years ago by young Kachin. Members targeted drug dealers, arrested suspects and provided rehabilitation. Police confirmed that they had received many complaints about Patjasan from ethnic Shan, particularly in Waingmaw Township. "We have issued warnings and made arrests in 8 cases since March," said Pol Maj Aung Myint Naing. He added that police suspected KIA involvement in the shooting deaths last week in Mansi of two members of the Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party. "We live in Kachin peacefully with all ethnic groups. We don't want to see ethnic conflict. We will try to campaign peacefully, but nobody knows what will happen in future," said U Win Oo, a member of the Shan-ni and Northern Shan Ethnic Solidarity Party (SNSP), which, like the TNDP, represents the

Tai-Leng, or Red Shan, ethnic group. Despite the range of threats and complexities, only one local observer group, PACE, has applied to observe the whole of Kachin State. “We have received no request from any international observer groups to cover Kachin. We have given permission only to PACE,” said Maung Kun from the election commission.¹¹

DPNS FOCUSES ON WINNING SUPPORT OF FARMERS

A revived political party is aiming for the farmers’ vote. Canvassers for the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) are concentrating on agricultural concerns in Tada-Oo Township, Mandalay Region, local secretary Thant Zin said. Kyaw San Khine, a candidate for Region Hluttaw Constituency 1 in Tada-Oo, said he spent his time explaining land and agriculture law to farmers. Many local cultivators in the surrounding 64 village groups have not been issued with form 7, which enables them to secure ownership of their land, he said. “Farmers who don’t understand the laws governing agricultural lands don’t know how to deal with the Land Records Department. It is difficult for them to get form 7. This is an important issue for farmers,” said Kyaw San Khine. “We’re getting support in the villages because we’re addressing farmers’ concerns over land ownership disputes,” he said. DPNS is campaigning in more than 160 villages for the Tada-Oo Pyithu Hluttaw seat and two seats in the regional hluttaw. “The main concerns we deal with are about how to get a form 7 and about high-school education,” said Daw May Phyu Swe, another DPNS candidate for the Mandalay Region Hluttaw. The party, which was dissolved by the former military regime in the wake of the 1988 uprising, is contesting 21 seats across the country.¹²

NEWCOMER TO PARTY POLITICS PUSHES VOTING RIGHTS FOR MONKS

The Chairman of the National Development Party (NDP) came out firmly in support of controversial race and religion protection laws passed earlier this year and went one step further on Monday by suggesting Burma should consider enfranchising monks, who are constitutionally barred from voting. The NDP chief, former presidential adviser Nay Zin Latt, made the party’s stance known in the Mon State capital Moulmein at an event held to introduce its regional candidates for Burma’s November general election. “We fervently support the race and religion protection laws,” Nay Zin Latt told a crowd of several hundred people that included Buddhist monks. “Other countries also stand by the interests of their own races and nationals, and we have no reason to be afraid of standing by the interests of nationalism and race and religion.” The legislative package known as the Race and Religion Protection Laws includes restrictions on religious conversion, polygamy and interfaith marriage, and also allows authorities to impose birth spacing requirements on a regional basis. Critics have derided the laws for impinging on the rights of women and religious minorities, particularly Muslims. Pinna Sara, a monk from Moulmein’s Ye Monastery said: “We should support the race and religion protection laws if they serve national interests and the interests of citizens.” When asked what the NDP’s position was on whether Buddhist monks and other religious leaders should be granted suffrage, Nay Zin Latt said he would be open to the possibility. “Democracy is based on freedom of expression, freedom of speech, equality and justice. There should be equality in a country that has transformed into a democracy and is practicing democracy,” he said. “When our party’s representatives get into Parliament, we’ll ask the representatives of other parties this question: How are other religions, matters related to race and religion like these, protected in other countries? In our country, can the spiritual leaders of other faiths vote?” he continued, in apparent reference to the omission of some religions from this prohibition. “If they can, why shouldn’t our spiritual leaders,

¹¹ In Kachin, candidates grapple with unstable electoral landscape – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17046-in-kachin-candidates-grapple-with-unstable-electoral-landscape.html> (Myanmar Times) 16 October 2015

¹² DPNS focuses on winning support of farmers – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17018-dpns-focuses-on-winning-support-of-farmers.html> (Myanmar Times) 15 October 2015

monks, have the vote? The code of conduct [of the Buddhist Order] does not concern me, but if I ask what equality and justice is, I think it will be a very difficult question to deny,” the party chairman said.

Lawyer Ko Ni said the prohibition does not affect Muslim religious leaders known as Mawlawi because they are not religious clergy. “Mawlawi are like ordinary people. They are not religious clergy. They can marry and have children,” said Ko Ni. Nay Zin Latt’s remarks come amid a rising tide of Buddhist nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment that has coincided with the lead-up to Burma’s landmark general election. The Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, a Buddhist nationalist group better known by its Burmese acronym Ma Ba Tha, is made up of both monks and laypeople, and was one of the leading proponents of the race and religion laws. Any effort to enfranchise members of religious orders would require a constitutional amendment. Granting suffrage to the Sangha, as the Buddhist monkhood is known in Burma, would politically empower a sizeable demographic, with estimates putting the number of monks in the country at about 500,000. A total of 18 political parties will contest the November election in Mon State. The NDP will run for 17 seats in Mon State across the Union Parliament and regional assembly—six in the Lower House, five in the Upper House and six in the Mon State legislature. The NDP is a relative newcomer to Burma’s political scene, having been registered only in July of this year. Nay Zin Latt resigned from his post as an adviser to President Thein Sein shortly after making his intention to help set up the party known. In terms of candidates fielded, the NDP is Burma’s fourth biggest party in this year’s election, contesting 353 seats nationwide.¹³

RED SHAN PARTY EYES MINISTER SEAT

Sai Win Phay, a former jade merchant, is set on being the next minister for Shan ethnic affairs in Mandalay Region so he can better lobby for his small ethnic minority group, the “Red Shan” or Tai-Leng. But it’s a hotly contested seat, with heavy hitters from the two largest parties, and bigger ethnic parties, also jostling for the position. Sai Win Phay is running with the Tai-Leng National Development Party, a new party with a low profile that he hopes to raise through grassroots canvassing. “I use door-to-door campaigning because our Shan people are spread out, not united,” he said. “Campaigning from house to house helps create a stronger network.” The Red Shan speak their own dialect of the Shan language and almost exclusively practise Buddhism. Most live in southern Kachin State, and in northern Sagaing and northern Mandalay regions. The country’s second-largest city is also a hub, as its home to more than 50,000 Shan residents. While other political parties have put forward Shan candidates for the ethnic minister seat, Sai Win Phay is the only Red Shan candidate in the running. “I will work for the social benefit of the elderly and disabled, as well as try to improve the educational, economic and health prospects for all the Shan people in Mandalay, through cooperation with the rest of Myanmar,” he said. “As Bogyoke Aung San said, equal rights to all ethnic people.”

Daw Khin May, a Red Shan trader in Mandalay, said she would vote for the TNDP because it is her ethnic party. She hopes Sai Win Phay will help the Red Shan people earn recognition as an ethnic minority. Currently, their identification cards recognise them as “Myanmar”, or “Shan”, but there is no “Red Shan” category. “If the people have awareness and will, the TNDP will win the Shan ethnic minister of affairs position,” she said. But one Red Shan monk, who asked not to be named, said he believes the TNDP stands little chance to win the seat. “Red Shan mostly live in Sagaing Region and Kachin State,” he said. “There are few Red Shan in Mandalay Region. They have only a small percentage [of the votes].” The TNDP is running 54 candidates, mostly in Kachin State and Sagaing Region. U Sai Win Htay is the only TNDP candidate in Mandalay, though the party has three offices there. Finances are tight for Sai Win Htay’s small campaign, which is run out of a donated house south

¹³ Newcomer to Party Politics Pushes Voting Rights for Monks – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/newcomer-to-party-politics-pushes-voting-rights-for-monks> (the Irrawaddy) 13 October 2015

of the city. A year's worth of rent at the house is the only campaign contribution from the party, he said, and he uses his own motorbike to travel to campaign stops in Mogok and Pyin Oo Lwin.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

The signing of the NCA between the Government and the eight EAOs is historic. Never before since Myanmar gained independence in 1948, has any Government agreed to find a solution through a political dialogue, to the problem that has plagued the country for nearly seven decades. The Government and the Tatmadaw, have also agreed that the objective of the dialogue is to form a new federal and democratic nation, for which the 2008 Constitution will be changed. This is truly unprecedented since until as late as 2013, federalism was considered to be subversive and divisive. It was the very reason the military seized power in 1962 and Myanmar lost its democracy. Changing the 2008 Constitution was also taboo as can be seen by the recent vote in Parliament. More incredible is the Government's concession that the EAOs can continue to carry arms during the political dialogue process (without being considered illegal) and that areas under their control would be developed only with their consent. If implemented, the NCA will pave the way for sweeping changes in the future.

But many have wondered if the NCA is valid since the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) amongst others have not signed the NCA. First, it should be noted that while the UWSA, NDAA (Mong La), NSCN-K (Naga) and the NMSP (Mon) did not sign the NCA, they have had bilateral ceasefires since the 1990s and have not fought a major battle for more than two decades. Thus there are now 12 groups that will not engage in battle. Three more that the Government has said can participate the political dialogue without signing the NCA because they are not engaged in armed struggle – ANC, LDU and WNO – brings the total to 15.

Three more – KIO, KNPP (Kayah/Karenni) and SSPP (SSA-N) – have said that they accept the NCA but are not yet ready to sign either because of not trusting the Government or because not everybody is included. The implementation of the NCA and the *Open Door* policy of the Government should in time then see them signing and participating in the political dialogue which all three want.

The most problematic are the remaining three – MNDAA (Kokang), AA (Arakan Army), and the TNLA (Ta-ang). They launched or re-launched their armed struggle after the Government initiated negotiations with the other groups in 2011. Because of this, the Tatmadaw is reluctant to include them in the NCA. But President Thein Sein has said he accepts in principle that they should be included. It now remains to be seen how the Government resolves this issue.

Second, the NCA is nationwide in nature irrespective of who signs it or not. Therefore, if the Government were to launch a major offensive against any or one of the non-signatories, the signatories have a right and a mechanism to address the issue. Thus the NCA is important.

The fact that the JICM was convened on the day that the NCA was signed and the JMC and UPDJC were formed the day after, bodes well for the implementation of the NCA. The first hurdles have been overcome. The question now is how the JMC will deal with the ongoing conflicts on the ground in northern Shan State and Kachin State, and how the ceasefire will be monitored in the other areas. Its effectiveness will add to confidence in the NCA.

The next hurdle is the adoption of a Framework for a Political Dialogue (60 days after the NCA signing – or by 14 December) and the initiation of a Political Dialogue (90 days after the signing – or by 13 January 2016). Unfortunately, the 8 November general elections will impact the adoption of the Framework. While much work has already been done to prepare for a common Framework acceptable

¹⁴ Red Shan party eyes minister seat – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/mandalay-upper-myanmar/16964-red-shan-party-eyes-minister-seat.html> (Myanmar Times) 13 October 2015

to all stakeholders, none of the political parties (92 in all) will be able to devote any attention to its adoption until at least the 15 of November. This leaves only 28 days for its adoption. Similarly, given the possibility of a new government after the elections, the question arises as to what can be achieved by initiating a Political Dialogue in January. While this is a valid concern, not initiating a Dialogue will void the NCA. Thus a compromise may have to be reached for the old Government to initiate the Dialogue as called for by the NCA, to publicly endorse the agreed Framework and set into motion, the establishment of the necessary mechanisms, management bodies, secretariats, and thematic working groups, while leaving the actual Political Dialogue and negotiations, to the new Government.

The success of the democratic reform and national reconciliation process will, therefore, depend on the will of the political leadership including that of the Tatmadaw, and all other stakeholders, to make sacrifices and compromises in the interest of the country.