
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 20

KNU OPPOSE USE OF KAREN NATIONAL FLAG IN ELECTIONS

The Karen National Union (KNU) together with Karen communities abroad have recently objected strongly against the use of the Karen national flag by parties planning to contest the elections this year. "The Karen national flag represents the entire Karen population and to use [our] national flag in any other circumstances is not appropriate and therefore we strongly object to it being used in such a way," said Naw Zippora Sein, General-Secretary of the KNU. She went on to add that the use of the Karen national flag by these parties is as an insult to the entire Karen population. The two parties which have registered and plan to use the Karen national flag are Kayin People's Party (KPP) and the Union Kayin League (UKL). Karen communities in the US, Canada, Japan, Australia, UK, New Zealand, Thailand and Sweden have also voiced their concerns and objections on the same issue. "The Karen parties contesting the elections do not represent the Karen people and therefore we strongly object to the national flag being used in such an inappropriate manner," said Mahn Robert Ba Zahn, Patron of the Karen Community in the US State of Minnesota. The present Karen national flag was adopted and decided by the "Daw-Ka-Lu" (or) Karen National League, and later supported by Karen members of parliament in 1936 during the time of Dr. Ba Maw's coalition government.¹

JUNTA RAKING CANDIDATES' BACKGROUNDS

Burmese authorities are reportedly collecting information on the backgrounds of candidates planning to contest the elections this year. So far, 19 parties have registered. According to Aye Lwin, Chairperson of the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP), background-checks had been carried out by the authorities on all party members of one of the more prominent parties looking to run this year who have registered with the Election Commission. Of the 19 parties which have registered to take part in the elections, the majority are either outwardly pro-junta or represent the ethnic minority groups.²

RAKHINE TOWN'S MUSLIMS WOODED TO VOTE FOR USDA

According to a Muslim leader in Rakhaing State, Muslim community leaders are being wooed to persuade the community to vote for the as-yet-unregistered Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) party. Aung Kyaw Oo, Chairman of the Buthitaung Township Peace and Development Council, summoned six Muslim community leaders to his office and asked them to mobilise Muslims to vote for the USDA. Dr Baw Shee, Tin Maung Win, Win Maung, and Khin Htay were among those who attended the meeting. The chairman gave each leader a *paso* (the traditional sarong, or longyi, worn by Burmese men). Of Buthitaung's population of 90,000, 70,000 are Muslim. The USDA is a government-backed social organization set up in 1993, which was converted into a political party recently and is preparing to contest the elections. However, it has not yet registered with the Election Commission.³

CHIN PROGRESSIVE PARTY NOT TO WASTE POLL ADVANTAGE

An ethnic Chin political party, which has yet to register with the Election Commission, has said that even though the junta's multi-party general election this year will not be free and fair, it needs to

¹ KNU oppose use of Karen national flag in elections - <http://www.khitpyaing.org/news/April2010/19410f.php> (Khitpyaing/ New Era Journal) 19 April 2010

² Junta raking candidate backgrounds - <http://www.dvb.no/elections/junta-raking-candidate-backgrounds/8659> (DVB) 20 April 2010

³ Rakhine town's Muslims wooed to vote USDA - <http://mizzima.com/news/breaking-and-news-brief/3829-rhakine-towns-muslims-wooded-to-vote-usda.html> (Mizzima) 21 April 2010.

participate for the sake of ethnic Chin people. According to Pu No Than Kap, a member of the Chin Progressive Party (CPP), “ethnic Chin groups are very poor, and by contesting the polls it would provide an opportunity to promote the interest of the Chin people.” Adding that under such circumstances it is imperative for the CPP not to waste this advantage and to take part in the polls. The party plans to contest in nine townships in Chin State, as well as in Kalay and Tamu townships in Sagaing Division. At present the party has formed a 29-member Central Executive Committee and has a Central Committee of 39 members. The CPP’s head office is in Yangon. At present two Chin political parties plan to contest the election in the Chin State. They are the Chin National Party (CNP), which has already registered with the Election Commission on 7 April, and the CPP. The CNP will contest in nine districts in Chin State.⁴

2 NEW POLITICAL PARTIES’ APPLICATIONS SCRUTINIZED AND ACCEPTED

In an announcement on 22 April 2010 published in the daily state-run media, the Union Election Commission has accepted the following two political parties in accordance with the Political Parties Registration Law:⁵

- (a) The 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar)
- (b) The Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics

KHIN MAUNG SWE MAY RUN SOLO AFTER MAY 6

A prominent member of the NLD’s Central Executive Committee, Khin Maung Swe, may decide to run as an independent candidate after the May 6 deadline for registration, when the NLD will cease to exist as a political entity under the Political Parties Registration Law. The decision taken by the NLD not to re-register has caused division within the party and has led to rumours that Khin Maung Swe may decide to contest the elections. However, Khin Maung Swe has made it known that he will remain loyal to the party until the deadline and denied the claims. He stated that he had no intention to do anything for the time being. Khin Maung Swe, a member of the NLD Information Department and CEC member is among the few leaders within the party who publicly criticised the decision taken on the issue of re-registration to contest the polls. Fellow CEC member Dr.Than Nyein, Rangoon Division Vice-Chairman of the NLD, who holds a similar opinion on re-registration, has also said he would continue to be loyal to the NLD until the cut-off date.⁶

UDP SAID JUNTA-BACKED PARTIES WILL BE THE MAIN RIVALS

According to the Chairman of the Union Democratic Party (UDP), government-backed parties would become the main rivals to the UDP in the elections. At a recent news conference, Phyo Min Thein stated that the release of political prisoners, a free and independent media and permission for international election observers are pre-requisites in order for the elections to be free and fair. While the junta has remained tight-lipped on its election plans, rumours have circulated that three government-supported parties including the USDA (which will continue using a lion as its logo) will be formed. The National Progressive Party has being tipped to be among the three, while the third remains undisclosed. Sixteen new political parties and three existing political parties have registered to contest the polls later this year, although the date of the elections has not yet been announced.⁷

⁴ Chin Progressive Party not to waste poll advantage - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3835-chin-progressive-party-not-to-waste-poll-advantage.html> (Mizzima) 22 April 2010.

⁵ Application to set up political parties scrutinized, passed - <http://myanmargeneva.org/NLM2010/eng/4Apr/n100423.pdf> (NLM) 23 April 2010.

⁶ Khin Maung Swe may run solo after May 6 - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3837-khin-maung-swe-may-run-solo-after-may-6.html> (Mizzima) 23 April 2010

⁷ UDP said Junta-backed parties will be the main rivals- <http://www.mizzima.com/news/election-2010/3843-udp-said-junta-backed-parties-will-be-the-main-rivals.html> (Mizzima) 23 April 2010.

ALL MON REGION DEMOCRACY PARTY ANNOUNCES OFFICIAL PARTY ROSTER, COMMENCES PARTY ELECTION PROCESS

According to a party spokesperson, the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) has been formed by a 5 member break-away group from the original 15-member "Mon Working Committee". The AMRDP claims that it has added an additional 10 members to its ranks, and that it has already begun the process of registering itself to run under its new name in the 2010 elections. The 5 individuals planning to register as a party are: Dr Min Nwe Soe, Nai Hla Aung from the Mon Literature Organization, university organizer Nai San Tin, former New Mon State Party (NMSP) Colonel Nai Myint Swe, and Dr Banya Aung Moe. According to Dr. Banya Aung Moe, the AMRDP was created as another option for those wishing to take part in the election in opposition to the "Mon Working Committee" which has decided to boycott the general elections. The party was officially named and founded during a meeting on 7 April 2010. It aims to represent Mon State and other ethnic minority groups living in Mon-controlled regions. The original 15-member working committee was founded in July 2009, on the 14th anniversary of the NMSP's ceasefire agreement with the SPDC. Its publicly announced goal was to work to increase party membership and to encourage Mon people to participate in open elections. The two main political parties, the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) and NMSP, have repeatedly stated that they will not participate in the 2010 election.⁸

ANALYSIS

The objections of the KNU and the Karen communities overseas to Karen parties in Burma using the Karen flag indicate the depth of the popular rejection of the SPDC's 2010 elections. On the other hand, the registration of two more ethnic-based parties indicates that the ethnic nationality leaders inside the country have adopted a more pragmatic approach to the elections. Whether the votes in the ethnic communities will be split between those who want to boycott and those who want to participate remains to be seen. Should this happen, it will work in the favour of the SPDC. Another factor to take into consideration is whether the ethnic parties will start competing against each other and leave the field wide open for the SPDC. The continued campaigning in Buthitaung in Rakhaing State also indicates that the SPDC is placing quite a lot of hope in ethnic and religious minority areas as opposed to the urban areas, which were NLD strongholds in 1990.

The 88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar) and the Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics have become the first two parties to be officially recognised and approved by the Election Commission. But the fact that they were accepted only after passing background checks is disturbing. Some have commented that this screening process will remove parties or candidates that the junta deems to be a liability or threat to its authority. What happens next to the ethnic-based parties will be interesting.

The rumours of splits within the main opposition party – the National League for Democracy (NLD) – is inevitable but does not bode well for the democracy movement. How the situation works itself out may determine whether or not there is a strong enough opposition to counter balance the regime's party after the elections. It is also curious that the USDA has not yet registered, although many of its members are actively and openly campaigning throughout the country.

⁸ All Mon Region Democracy Party announces official party roster, commences party election process - <http://mon-imna.blogspot.com/2010/04/all-mon-region-democracy-party.html> (IMNA) 23 April 2010.