ELECTION MONITOR NO. 45

BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS EASE WAY FOR MEMBERS TO ENTER PARLIAMENT

Many professional associations including the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce (UMFCCI) and Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association (MCEA) have amended their constitutions in the lead up to the November 7 election, allowing members and office bearers to become party members and even candidates. The groups bill themselves as non-governmental and previously required members to be apolitical, at least publicly. However, since the announcement in 2008 that multi-party elections would be held this year, most associations have liberalised their policies as it was clear that some of their members would take part as candidates. Those planning to run as candidates will likely be standing as representatives for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the National Unity Party (NUP) or as independents. They include:[1]

1. U Win Myint, Chairman of UMFCCI

2. U Htay Myint, Chairman of Myanmar Fisheries Federation

3. Dr. Khin Shwe, President of the Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association

4. U Nyan Htun Oo, CEC member of Myanmar Engineering Society

5. Dr. Khin Maung Htun, CEC member of Myanmar Engineering Society

6. U Tin Kha, Chairman of Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association

7. Dr. Tin Tun Oo, Vice-Chairman of Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association

UP TO 11,000 PRISONERS TO GET CHANCE TO VOTE

The Department of Corrections could release as many as 11,000 prisoners in the lead up to the November 7 election, a department official has said. "More than 3,000 convicted prisoners will have their sentences reduced before the election and they will be released from their respective prisons. They will be able to vote on November 7," he added, noting that the the instruction came from the Union Election Commission (UEC). The official declined, however, to provide a list of the prisoners who were due to be released. There are estimated to be more than 50,000 convicted criminals serving sentences in Myanmar's 43 prisons and 100 labour sites at any one time, as well as about 6,000 awaiting trial. The department releases an average of 1,700 to 2,000 prisoners each week, the official said.[2]

SELECTION OF CHIEF MINISTERS FOR STATES AND REGIONS ALREADY MADE BY USDP

While many parties have been occupied with election campaigns, the junta-backed USDP party has already taken steps to nominate former junta generals to serve as Chief Ministers in the new government to be formed after the elections. According to a military officer from Nay Pyi Taw Regional Command, those chosen to serve as Chief Ministers include:[3]

1. Lt. Gen Myint Swe (retired)   -   Yangon Region

2. Lt. Gen Ye Myint (retired)   -   Mandalay Region

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[1] Business associations ease way for members to enter parliament - http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/544/54411news.html
(Myanmar Times) 11 October 2010.

[2] Up to 11,000 prisoners to get chance to vote - http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/544/54408news.html (Myanmar Times) 11
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[3] Selection of chief ministers for states and regions - http://www.khitpyaing.org/index.php?route=detail&id=5024 (The New Era Journal)
15 October 2010.

3. Lt. Gen Thar Aye (retired)   -   Sagaing Region

4. Lt. Gen Khin Zaw (retired)   -   Tanintharyi Region

5. Lt. Gen Aye Myint (retired)   -   Mon State

UEC CHAIRMAN MEETS STATE/DISTRICT/TOWNSHIP/WARD/VILLAGE-TRACT SUB-COMMISSIONS IN MYITKYINA

A work coordination meeting between Union Election Commission (UEC) Chairman U Thein Soe and members of Kachin State sub-commission and district/township/ward/village-tract sub-commissions took place at the Town Hall in Myitkyina, Kachin State on 6 October. It was also attended by UEC members U N Zaw Naw, Dr. Maung Htoo, Dr. Ba Maung and U Win Kyi and members of the Kachin State election sub-commissions. The UEC chairman called on the sub-commissions members and polling station officers and members to carry out electoral work in accordance with the election laws and rules and directives in order to successfully hold multiparty democratic general elections and to ensure a smooth electoral process without any delays in casting votes. The chairmen and secretaries of respective sub-commissions presented reports on the progress of their work to the UEC chairman, after which Chairman U Thein Soe inspected a demonstration of the voting process at the Basic Education High School No. 1 in Ayar Ward, Myitkyina.[4]

UEC MEMBER U TIN AUNG AYE INSPECTS POLLING STATION IN PABEDAN TOWNSHIP

UEC member Dr. Tin Aung Aye accompanied by U Ko Ko, Chairman of the Yangon Division election sub-commission, and other officials visited the polling station of No. 1 State High School Pabedan township, Yangon District (West) on 3 October. On the occasion, township election sub-commission chairman U Tun Myint explained procedures and preparations being made and submitted progress reports to those present. UEC member Dr. Tin Aung Aye made concluding remarks and gave instructions on and inspected the work being carried out at the polling station.[5]

UEC MEMBER MEETS ELECTION SUB-COMMISSIONS IN PATHEIN

UEC Member Daw Khin Hla Myint met chairmen and members of the district and township election sub-commissions of Pathein, Ayeyawady Region in Pathein on 4 October, as well as inspecting a sample polling station at No. 1 Basic Education High School, where she was shown a demonstration of how votes will be cast. From 5 to 8 October, she also met election sub-commissions members in Myaungmya, Hinthada, Maubin and Pyapon where she also inspected sample polling stations and was shown voting demonstrations.[6]

LOCAL RESIDENTS GIVEN VOTING DEMONSTRATION IN BAWLAKE TOWNSHIP

Under the supervision of the Bawlake District sub-commission and arranged by the Township sub-commissions, demonstration on how to cast votes were given at polling stations in Shanpaing and Kayahpaing wards in Bawlake on 6 and 9 September. A total of 150 local residents took part in the demonstrations. Township sub-commission Chairman U Ko Gyi explained the purpose of the demonstration, and Secretary U Oo Rai and member U Aung Kyaw Min together with ten voters

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[4] UEC chairman meets state/district/township/ward/village-tract sub-commissions in Myitkyina -
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-09.pdf (NLM) 9 October 2010.
[5] UEC member U Tin Aung Aye inspects polling station in Pabedan township - http://www.myanmar.com/newspaper/kyaymon/Oct09.pdf
(The Mirror) 9 October 2010.
[6] Member of UEC meets elections sub-commissions in Pathein - http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-11.pdf (NLM) 11
October 2010.

demonstrated how to cast votes. After that, district sub-commission member U Khin Saw explained the polling booths and answered questions.[7]

ANALYSIS

With elections just a few weeks away, parties have been kept busy with visits to local constituencies.

Steps taken by normally apolitical trade and business associations in the private sector to participate in the 7 November elections show how the junta is systematically recruiting prominent businessmen to promote and serve their cause. Those who run as candidates for junta-backed parties will likely be rewarded with lucrative contracts and positions for their services.

The initiative taken by the junta in selecting retired SPDC generals to serve as Chief Ministers in the various states and regions show the measures being taken to maintain strong control in the running of future political institutions in Myanmar by the military.

However, the role being played by those contesting the elections, as well as the voters, should not be dismissed out of hand because of the regime's tactics. To promote democracy and bring about change, it may be crucial for the people to exercise their basic democratic rights by voting.

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[7] Casting vote demonstration in Bawlake township - http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-12.pdf (NLM) 12 October 2010.