

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 31

OFFICIAL MEDIA

DATE SET FOR UNION PEACE CONFERENCE

The President's Office announced on 18 December that the Union Peace Conference has been scheduled to take place on 12 January 2016 as part of the peaceful solution to national reconciliation, ending armed conflict and solving political disputes through diplomatic means. President Thein Sein extended the olive branch to ethnic armed organisations on 18 August 2011, an initiative that resulted in the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement with 8 ethnic groups on 15 October this year. The ceasefire required the signatories to pave a way to political dialogue. Accordingly, the framework for political dialogue was finalized on 15 December, thereby setting a date for the Union Peace Conference.¹

GOVT, NLD DISCUSS SMOOTH TRANSFER OF GOVERNMENT DUTIES

The government has formed a support committee to help facilitate the handover of power to the NLD, with Union Minister Hla Tun as chairman and Information Union Minister Ye Htut, Director General of the President's Office Hla Tun, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Construction Maung Ohn and Director of the President's Office Zaw Htay as members. The NLD has also assigned its Central Executive Committee members Win Htein and Dr Myo Aung and former Rector of Yangon University Dr Aung Thu to help coordinate the transition in conjunction with the government's support committee. A coordination meeting on transferring the duties of the Head of State and of the government was held in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 December and the meeting was led by National League for Democracy (NLD) chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi.²

PRESIDENT SAYS PEACE WILL STRENGTHEN NEW DEMOCRACY

The final framework for political dialogue was submitted to President Thein Sein in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 December. In his speech, the president spoke of his government's commitment to ending 60 years of internal armed conflict, stressing that the restoration of peace will provide a solid foundation for a democratic system. Face-to-face discussions and negotiations erased doubts among the parties involved in the peace talks, further fortifying mutual understanding. The president attributed the armed conflict to differences in political approaches, conceding that the warring parties share the same patriotism. The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw unanimously approved the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which the president called a product of mutual trust, adding that the ceasefire agreement is more of a political assurance than a truce. He pointed out the need to find solutions to armed conflict through political dialogue and make combined efforts to rebuild the Union into a democracy in line with the outcomes of the political dialogue. "The onus is on all of us to build a dream Union and bequeath a better legacy to future generations," the president said. "The people have undergone the painful days of armed conflict and political disagreement, missing good opportunities to put us on a par with the international community," the president said. He urged all stakeholders to make strong commitments to root out armed conflict and political disagreement while helping the

¹ Date set for Union Peace Conference –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 December 2015 (p. 1)

² Committee appointed to manage power transfer –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 December 2015 (p. 1)/

Govt, NLD discuss smooth transfer of government duties –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 December 2015 (p. 2)

people get rid of their emotional stress. According to the president, the Union Peace Conference is expected to start in the first week of January. Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham also spoke at the event, serving as chairman of the Union Political Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC). As mentioned in the NCA, the 9-chapter framework was finalised 60 days after the signing of the NCA by 8 ethnic armed organisations on 15 October, according to the vice president. He attributed the successful implementation of the political dialogue framework to the stakeholders' genuine and solemn interest in the peace process. He said that the NCA requires the Union Peace Conference to be held within 90 days of the October signing. Minister Aung Min, representing the government, along with Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win representing the ethnic armed organisations and Thu Wei representing the political parties, handed over the framework agreement to the president.³

UPDJC APPROVES DRAFT FRAMEWORK, SETS RATIO OF STAKEHOLDER GROUPS IN POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) held its 3rd meeting in Nay Pyi Taw from 14 to 15 December to discuss the political dialogue framework drafted by the Framework for Political Dialogue Drafting Committee. In his opening remarks, Vice Chairman of the UPDJC and a representative of the Union government Minister Aung Min, expressed his delight at the unanimous approval by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, saying the approval by the Union Parliament can be considered a first step toward ensuring the success of political dialogue. He also said the achievement of designing a draft framework within three days, referring the draft framework for political dialogue that was approved on 3 December, would be helpful for promoting cooperation and coordination among stakeholders in future meetings. Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, vice chairman of the UPDJC, a representative of the ethnic armed groups and general secretary of the Karen National Union (KNU), acknowledged the unanimous approval of the NCA by members of parliament. The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee was formed with a total of 48 members—16 each from the government, ethnic armed groups and political parties—to conduct the political dialogue between the government and ethnic armed organisations. According to the timeline of the ceasefire terms, political dialogue is expected to start before 14 January, as it must begin within 90 days of the signing of the political framework by the joint committee.

The 3rd plenary session of the (UPDJC) concluded on 15 December with the committee approving a draft political dialogue framework and determining the ratio of representation of stakeholders in the dialogue with the participation of 700 representatives from the country's stakeholder groups and other players. Hla Maung Shwe, one of participants of the meeting, told local news media on 15 December that the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organisations (EAO) and political parties will have 150 seats each in the political dialogue, 75 seats each will be given to the government and Parliament and 50 seats each are set for ethnic leaders who are not from EAOs and other invitees. Hla Maung Shwe, who is also senior adviser at the Myanmar Peace Centre, confirmed that the EAOs' demand for 150 seats was approved at the meeting following the facilitation of Nyan Win who was representing the National League for Democracy, the winning party in the 2015 general elections. "The number of seats for the EAOs, Tatmadaw, the government and Parliament was previously suggested by stakeholder groups representing the government, Tatmadaw and Parliament at 100 each but ethnic ceasefire signatory representatives demanded 50 more." The NLD representative negotiated the number of seats for the Tatmadaw and EAOs to 150 in political dialogue by agreeing to reduce the number of seats for the government and Parliament, he added. Those present also agreed at the meeting that the ratio of representation is open to re-negotiation in future, the MPC adviser added. Whether or not the non-signatories receive special invitee status to participate in political dialogue, it is planned

³ Laying the foundation: President says peace will strengthen new democracy – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 December 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

that the two sides of the UPDJC—ethnic signatories and the government—will seek the approval of the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting set for 15 December. Three groups comprising a committee of 16 representatives from political parties, the government and ethnic ceasefire signatories held its third meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. The meeting lasted for 2 days to approve the draft framework and set the ration of representation of stakeholders in political dialogue.⁴

US TRADE SANCTIONS LIFTED FOR 6 MONTHS TO AID GOVERNMENT CHANGEOVER

The United States is temporarily easing trade restrictions on Myanmar by allowing all shipments to go through its ports and airports for 6 months, in an effort to boost the Southeast Asian country's opposition party after its landmark election win in November, US officials said on 7 December. The policy change, comes after Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory last month in Myanmar's first nationwide free elections in 25 years, applies even to ports and airports controlled by entities on the US sanctions blacklist, the officials said. To bolster Myanmar's transition to democracy after decades of military rule, US officials began lifting sanctions against the country after a civilian government was formed in 2011. But officials acknowledged on Monday that remaining US sanctions against those with ties to Myanmar's military have had the unintended consequence of halting "many, many dozens" of shipments.

Reuters reported last month that major US banks, such as Citigroup, Bank of America and PNC Financial were shying away from backing Myanmar trade after discovering that the Asia World port — one of the country's most important shipping terminals — is controlled by a businessman on America's sanctions blacklist. Exporters use trade finance from banks to ensure they get paid after shipments arrive, and the banks' withdrawal has led to a sharp decline in US shipments into Myanmar. "It was beginning to escalate," said a senior US official. "Not only US banks but also third country exporters and third country financial institutions were beginning to hold up trade going into and out of Burma," the official said, using another name for the country of 51 million people. Officials cautioned that while the policy shift allows financing of shipments through blacklisted trade hubs, banks are still barred from doing business directly with the banned firms.

A second senior administration official also said on 7 December that the move would lend a boost to Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party, and was "potentially the single most important thing that we can do on the economic front immediately to give the NLD some breathing space over the next several months as it forms its government." The official said the banks' freeze on much of Myanmar's trade with the West was most punishing on regular Myanmar citizens. "You can think of the Burmese rice farmer who is trying to get some rice out" of the Asia World port, the official said. "The trade transaction is held up and the rice ends up rotting in the docks." Years after the US began to lift its near-total ban on trade with Myanmar, more than a hundred people and companies remain on the US sanctions blacklist, some of them the country's biggest economic players, creating a minefield for Western businesses seeking to profit from the new openings. "The US has been very much a proponent of US businesses entering and increasing trade and economic ties," said Peter Kucik, a former senior sanctions advisor at the US Treasury Department. "Impediments like this really need to be dealt with quickly and efficiently to make sure they don't undermine that very intention." US officials said they would likely consider an extension of the sanctions relief in several months. "There's no question businesses would like a longer license ... but while this window is not ideal from a business perspective,

⁴ UPDJC discusses framework draft at third meeting –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 December 2015 (p. 3) /

UPDJC approves draft framework, sets ratio of stakeholder groups in political dialogue –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 December 2015 (p. 2)/

NCA approved by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 December 2015 (p. 2)

for now it substantially addresses the challenge,” said Peter Harrell, who advises businesses on entering markets under sanction. “Now you know you will be able to ship into the country for at least 6 months.”⁵

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION TO ASSIST DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC MEDIA

As part of their efforts to develop ethnic media the Ministry of Information, the National League for Democracy’s central information committee, BNI and the Mizzima News agency met for the second time in Yangon on 11 December, focusing on seeking ways to lend assistance to the progress of ethnic media by the News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE). During the meeting, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information Tint Swe, went over the previous meeting with the minister, saying that both sides had discussed on how the NPE could assist ethnic media without influencing their editorial freedom. The NPE has a plan to start providing assistance to ethnic media in the first phase, according to Managing-Director Kyaw Soe of the NPE, adding that NPE has set a budget allocation to ethnic media enterprise in the 2016-17 FY. Aung Shin (Monywa Aung Shin), a member of the National League for Democracy’s central information committee, welcomed the program of the Ministry of Information, suggesting representatives of the ethnic media to set a timeframe to meet with the ministry again after holding inclusive talks with the ethnic media. The Editor-in-Chief of the Mizzima Media Soe Myint, clarified current cooperation between Mizzima and the ethnic media, and Executive Director Daw Nann Hpaw Gay and Zin Lay of BNI both clarified the struggles being faced by ethnic media in regions and states. Both sides agreed to hold a meeting on 20 January, focusing on the outcomes of the first ethnic media meeting and to finalise the program in the last week of January.⁶

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US GENERAL SAYS EAGER FOR BURMA ENGAGEMENT

The US Army’s Commander in Asia General Vincent Brooks told a defense writers’ roundtable in Washington on 8 December that military leaders from Burma’s partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were also eager to see such US engagement with Burma. The US General said that he was eager for closer ties to the military in Burma after elections that the pro-democracy opposition won by a landslide, but this would have to wait for a policy decision by the US government.

He recalled a meeting with ASEAN defense ministers in 2014. “I literally had leaders from other militaries grabbing me by the hand and pulling me to the Burmese general who was there; the region really wants the United States to engage Burma and help them to move forward,” he said. “Now we have to move at the pace we are allowed to,” Brooks said.

The United States has been working to boost military ties throughout Asia to counter an increasingly powerful and assertive China, which shares a border with Burma. Washington began lifting sanctions against Burma after a quasi-civilian government was formed in 2011 following decades of harsh military rule, but continuing human rights concerns that worry US lawmakers have kept military-to-military ties to a bare minimum.

Brooks said Burma’s elections last month, in which pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won a landslide victory, “have caused us to be ready to move forward.” “But we haven’t advanced very rapidly thus far. I think there is good potential and so we will await policy guidelines on that.” Brooks said one of his generals had been able to speak at Burma’s war college and

⁵ US opens door to trade: Trade sanctions lifted for 6 months window to aid govt changeover – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 December 2015 (p. 1 & 2)/
US plans to amend trade sanctions on Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-06-red.pdf> (GNLM) 6 December 2015 (p. 5)

⁶ MoI to assist development of ethnic media – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-12-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 December 2015 (p. 2)

he would like to engage more directly himself. “It’s a relationship that I really want us to have and I am eager to be allowed to do that ... just kind of spend a bit more time with them.” Brooks said the United States saw it as an opportunity to export US military professionalism in terms of governance, engagement with the media, the public and civilian government.

US officials on 7 December said Washington was temporarily easing trade restrictions on Burma in an effort to boost Aung San Suu Kyi’s party after its election win. US concerns about the military’s rights record were aired again last week when the State Department called for an investigation of reports of army atrocities in Shan State.⁷

SSA-N AGREE TO LIMITED TROOP WITHDRAWAL AFTER TWO-DAY TALKS

The Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) agreed to withdraw troops north of a key highway on 8 December after two days of talks with government negotiators aimed at addressing conflict which broke out in central Shan State on 6 October, leaving thousands of civilians displaced.

A member of the SSA-N said the armed group had agreed to withdraw troops from the north side of a highway between Mong Nawng and Kyethi Townships following the Dec. 7-8 dialogue in Nay Pyi Taw. “We will withdraw our troops involved in confrontations with them [the Burma Army]. This is our first priority; to reduce tensions,” said Major Sai Phone Han of the SSA-N. “After this, we hope our IDPs [internally displaced persons] will be able to go home. This is our second priority.”

Fighting between the two sides has recurred since early October, with the Burma Army launching multiple offensives that included aerial support and heavy artillery fire. Between 6,000 and 10,000 civilians were forced to flee their homes to escape clashes which were reported in Mongshu, Kyethi and Mong Nawng Townships.

The SSA-N rejected an order from the Burma Army late last month to withdraw from positions east of a motorway cutting through the three flashpoint townships, vowing to defend their Wan Hai headquarters in Kyethi Township.

“They told us at the meeting they will not conduct any more military operations if we agree to withdraw our troops,” Major Sai Phone Han said. Sai Phone Han said the Burma Army would also be required to withdraw from select positions and refrain from establishing new bases.

Previous talks were held between a government delegation led by President’s Office Minister Aung Min and representatives of the Shan group’s political wing, the Shan State Progressive Party, on Nov. 23-24. On the ground, tensions remain as the two sides maintain positions in close proximity. Despite a lull in fighting, displaced civilians remain wary of returning to their homes and paddy fields.⁸

ETHNIC ALLIANCE UPHOLDS SUSPENSION OF TWO MEMBERS

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an 11-member ethnic alliance, has voted to uphold the suspension of two of its member groups that were among eight signatories to a “nationwide” ceasefire agreement signed in mid-October.

On 8 December, the second day of a 4-day summit of UNFC member groups in Chiang Mai, attendees voted to uphold a decision to suspend the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO) that was provisionally agreed upon at an emergency meeting convened last month.

⁷ US General Says Eager for Burma Engagement – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/102523.html> (the Irrawaddy) 9 December 2015

⁸ SSA-N Agree to Limited Troop Withdrawal after Two-Day Talks – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/102545.html> (the Irrawaddy) 9 December 2015

“We continue to keep them as suspended members,” said UNFC Vice-Chair Nai Hong Sar. “There were vacancies for two joint general secretary seats of the UNFC. We elected two new members by voting this morning [Nov. 8].” Salai Lian Hmong Sakhong, a CNF leader, told local news media last month that the move was not in accordance with the UNFC charter. “They [the UNFC] did a thing that they should not do. They said they are angry that we signed the NCA—the text we all agreed in drafting,” he said.

Many UNFC members are also members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), a body tasked with leading negotiations with the government on a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

The October 15 signing of the so-called nationwide pact included 8 non-state armed organizations, including the CNF and PNLO, but several of the country’s biggest ethnic armed groups opted not to sign, citing the government’s unwillingness to countenance a more inclusive accord. The Karen National Union (KNU), a ceasefire signatory, suspended its membership with the UNFC in September last year and no representative attended this week’s summit in Chiang Mai.

Addressing alliance members on 7 December, UNFC chairman and Vice-Chair of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) N’Ban Hla, said the looming change of government in 2016 offered ethnic armed groups an ideal chance to fight for their political rights at the negotiating table. “The new incoming government has a better relationship with us... This is a great chance for us,” he said, while also sounding a note of caution on the role of Burma’s military in negotiations.

The four-day dialogue focused on how to take the peace process forward in 2016, with the UNFC chairman declaring the alliance was “ready to talk” about all issues and hoped the government would reciprocate, particularly on sensitive topics such as the establishment of a federal army. UNFC members also pledged to abide by their stance of pushing for an all-inclusive ceasefire agreement with Naypyidaw.⁹

3 POLITICAL PARTIES APPLY FOR UNA MEMBERSHIP

Three ethnic political parties have recently applied for United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) membership. The UNA is an ethnic political-parties alliance and comprises of parties that contested in the 1990 election.

According to recent news, the parties that applied for new membership are Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), Rakhine Patriotic Party (RPP) and Chin League for Democracy (CLD).

“There are 3 political parties that have applied for membership in the UNA. They requested to become members because they want to collaborate with our UNA. These parties are ethnic parties. Concerning a new membership application, we have to discuss the issue with UNA members [first],” said Aye Thar Aung, of Arakan National Party (ANP) and leader of the UNA.

“We negotiate with other ethnic parties because we want, per our party’s objective, to work for the benefits of our state, our people and our union. Thus, we have decided to join the UNA as its member,” said Manam Tu Ja, chairman of KSDP.

The UNA held its first conference in December 2014. Its members also met before the 2015 election to discuss how to win major votes. As a result, about 100 representatives from the UNA won in the recent elections and have been elected into seats throughout all three Hluttaw. The UNA members are Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Mon National Party (MNP), Kayah National Party (KNP), Kachin National Democracy Congress Party (KNDCP), Arakan National Party (ANP), Zomi

⁹ Ethnic Alliance Upholds Suspension of Two Members – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/102609.html> (the Irrawaddy) 10 December 2015

Democracy League Party (ZDLP), Karen National Party (KNP), and Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKDP).¹⁰

SHAN ARMY MEETS UNFC TO DEFUSE TENSIONS

The head of the Shan State Army-South held talks with other armed groups in Chiang Mai on 15 December in an effort to defuse tensions following clashes in northern Shan State. The SSA-South and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army have clashed repeatedly since 27 November, with fighting reported in Namtsam, Man Tong and Kyaukme Townships on 13 and 14 December. The TNLA has accused the Shan organisation of launching offensives in collaboration with the Tatmadaw, while the SSA-South accuses the ethnic Palaung armed group of abducting 23 civilians earlier this month. The SSA-South signed the nationwide ceasefire on 15 October, while the TNLA was excluded from the process by the government because of its role in the Kokang conflict earlier this year.

SSA-South leader Lieutenant General Yawd Serk, who also heads the group's political wing, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), met with members of the United Nationalities Federal Council in Chiang Mai on 15 December to discuss the fighting. The UNFC is an umbrella organisation for 9 ethnic armed groups, including the TNLA but not the RCSS.

But Mai Aik Kyaw, a TNLA communications officer, played down the significance of the Chiang Mai talks, saying that his organisation did not send a representative to the meeting. "It is just a meeting between some UNFC members and the RCSS. We are not part of the talks," he said. Representatives from the RCSS and the UNFC could not be reached for comment. Mai Aik Kyaw said the SSA-South and the Tatmadaw had launched "aggressive" offensives in northern Shan State in recent days. "There were four clashes on December 13 and three on December 14," he said. He said the TNLA hoped to end the conflict through negotiation even though they did not take part in the Chiang Mai talks. Fighting would only stop if the Shan army withdrew its soldiers from TNLA territory, he said. "We don't want people in these areas to be affected. We want to build peace through negotiation," he said.

The fighting has raised alarms about a widening of divisions among ethnic armed groups, which have split in recent months over whether to sign the nationwide ceasefire. A major group that refused to join the ceasefire, the Shan State Progressive Party, is to meet regional Tatmadaw commanders this week to discuss implementation of an agreement reached in Nay Pyi Taw aimed at ending fighting in central Shan State. "I am sure that a talk [with Eastern Central Command] will be held this week concerning the implementation of the six points of the agreement," said Major Sai Su, a spokesperson for the armed group. The first step of the agreement is the withdrawal by both sides of their forces along a strategic route in order to help facilitate a return of IDPs to their homes. Aid groups estimate that some 10,000 civilians were displaced by the fighting that flared in early October. No serious clashes have been reported since an outline agreement was reached in late November.¹¹

OVER 80 PERSONS PROBED FOR ELECTION VIOLATIONS IN IRRAWADDY DIVISION

Eighty-two individuals have been charged or are under investigation in Irrawaddy Division for violating Burma's election law on polling day, according to local police. Allegations include soliciting votes on religious grounds and proxy voting, with at least four cases already brought to trial, according to Aung Naing Moe, a spokesperson for the Irrawaddy Division police force. "As there are complaints, we have

¹⁰ 3 political parties apply for UNA membership – <http://monnews.org/2015/12/12/3-political-parties-apply-for-una-membership/> (IMNA) 12 December 2015

¹¹ Shan army meets UNFC to defuse tensions – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/18160-shan-army-meets-unfc-to-defuse-tensions.html> (Myanmar Times) 16 December 2015

opened 82 cases under the election law. Some cases are being investigated and some have already been brought to trial in Hinthada and Pyapon townships,” Aung Naing Moe said.

Complaints were filed between 8 and 22 November at various police stations, according to the police officer, with many filed by members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) which suffered a bruising defeat at the polls. Reportedly among the accused are 10 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), with other persons including polling officers and staff as well as voters. Of the 82 cases, 29 originated in Hinthada Township, 21 in Pyapon Township, 19 in Patheingyi Township, seven in Maubin Township and six in Myaungmya Township, according to the divisional police force. None of the defendants are being held in detention.

Chairman of the NLD in Irrawaddy Division, Dr Myo Nyunt, said it appeared authorities were quick to accept complaints from USDP members, whereas complaints submitted by NLD representatives were relayed through several layers of bureaucracy. “We’ve filed complaints regarding three cases of voters’ casting ballots twice in Pyapon Township. We sought the remarks of township law officers to file the charge and they submitted it to district [officers] who again submitted the complaint to divisional [officers],” said Dr Myo Nyunt.

Aung Myint, chairman of the Irrawaddy Division election sub-commission, said some plaintiffs had sought to withdraw their complaints. “Some have asked to withdraw the charges after filing a complaint with the police because there was not enough evidence. Police stations do not close the case immediately but seek the remarks of township election sub-commissions. They have to decide whether it is acceptable that the case will be closed,” he said. Complaints, which can be filed up to 45 days after the poll, have also been filed with the divisional election sub-commission, with at least one case forwarded to the Union Election Commission.¹²

36 YANGON REGION CANDIDATES FAIL TO DISCLOSE CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES

Thirty-six out of a total of 809 candidates in Yangon Region who participated in the 2015 general election on 8 November failed to submit campaign spending reports. Four candidates are from the southern district, 19 are from the north, one is from the west and 12 are from the east.

“There are 147 candidates who participated in the elections in the southern district. Four failed to submit campaign spending reports,” said Than Zaw Htwe, the electoral officer of the southern district.

“There are 195 candidates who participated in the elections in the northern district. Nineteen failed to submit campaign spending reports. Some of these were from small parties,” said Aung Khine, the electoral officer for the northern district.

“There are 205 candidates who participated in the elections in the western district. One candidate, representing the National Democratic Force, failed to submit a campaign spending report,” said an official of western district election sub-commission.

“There are 244 candidates who participated in the elections in the eastern district. Twelve from small parties failed to submit campaign spending reports,” said Min Ko Aung, the electoral officer for the eastern district.

“All ethnic minority candidates have already submitted campaign spending reports to the Yangon Region election sub-commission. Seven ethnic minority candidates participated in the elections from

¹² Over 80 Persons Probed for Election Violations in Irrawaddy Division – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/over-80-persons-probed-for-election-violations-in-irrawaddy-division> (the Irrawaddy) 17 December 2015

Yangon Region,” said Khin Zaw Tun, the electoral officer for the Yangon Region election sub-commission.

“All the candidates representing the National League for Democracy (NLD) already submitted campaign spending reports before the designated deadline,” said Myint Htay, the chairman of Yangon Region NLD branch.

The Union Election Commission previously issued an announcement that a candidate who fails to submit a campaign spending report will be banned from participating in the next election, which is expected to be held in five years.¹³

ANALYSIS

The date to convene the Union Peace Conference could prove to be the laying of the foundation for Myanmar’s national reconciliation process while at the same time become President Thein Sein’s final contribution in the country’s reform process before leaving office. While a committee has been formed to ensure the smooth transition of power many details will need to be ironed out before the newly elected NLD-government is sworn into office. Even after a government is formed the deliberations in parliament in nominating and election of the President and 2 Vice-Presidents could still become challenges for the incoming government. The role once again of the military (Tatmadaw) will become crucial and how the NLD government handles its ties will be the one of the major challenges for NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi in the next five years. However, the fact that the NLD is been regarded as a democratically elected government will go a long way in help shaping Myanmar’s political future and that the understanding and assistance of the international community will be needed if the current on-going reforms process is to be successful and sustainable.

¹³ 36 Yangon Region candidates fail to disclose campaign expenditures – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/36-yangon-region-candidates-fail-disclose-campaign-expenditures> (Eleven Myanmar) 18 December 2015