
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 15

WIN TIN PERMITTED TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE RANGOON

Burma's longest serving prisoner and NLD member, Win Tin was allowed to travel outside Rangoon for the first since his release in 2008. The 80-year old veteran politician travelled to Mandalay with Ohn Kyaing, CEC member of the NLD, Poet Pyapon Ni Lone Oo (aka) Aung Myint and Writer Monywa Aung Shin to attend the birth centenary of Burmese Writer, Ludu U Hla. Since his release in 2008, Win Tin's travels had been limited due to restrictive measures imposed by the authorities, however, he had been granted permission for visits to Kungyankone and Hlegu in the past. The present visit to Mandalay was made possible only after Win Tin had been issued with his national identification card by the authorities. Prior to his departure from Rangoon, Win Tin was asked to provide his itinerary to government intelligence officials and, with the exception of being stopped for questioning by the police at the bus terminal, was allowed to proceed. During his three-day trip to Mandalay and Pyin Oo Lwin in Central Burma, Win Tin met and briefed members of the NLD from over 30 townships on the party's political stand and its decision to expand the Central Executive Committee and the Central Committee. Win Tin's prominent role in anti-junta activities both before and since his imprisonment has made him a leading figurehead for the opposition in Burma, and also a popular point of contact for international media.¹

USDA LOBBIES MUSLIM VOTERS IN KACHIN STATE

The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) has entrusted a group led by Khin Maung Latt, brother of Brig-Gen. Thein Zaw, Minister for Post and Telecommunications, to lobby the local Muslim population in Myitkyina as it prepares for the upcoming elections. Other members of the group include Dr. Khin Maung Tun, CEC member of Kachin State USDA, Lt. Col Myo Swe (retired) and Major Myint Swe (retired). The group has been busy campaigning in local mosques and religious gatherings and urging the Muslim community to vote for Thein Zaw, the would-be USDA candidate for Myitkyina. The group has visited and campaigned in Aung Nan Ward, and visits to mosques in Kyunpintha and Kaymarthiri Wards in Myitkyina have been scheduled. According to a local resident, Minister Thein Zaw has set up 18 free clinics and medical dispensaries in Sitapu, Dukahtaung, Naung-nan, Shwe-set, Sha-daung wards and villages in Myitkyina to provide free medical care in a bid to gain support.²

NLD TO RECONSTITUTE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

As part of its plan to further strengthen and consolidate the party's organizational structure, the NLD Central Executive Committee (CEC) has decided to reconstitute its Central Committee (CC). The decision was taken at the first meeting of the newly formed twenty member Central Executive Committee and according to party officials, the changes would be carried out in line with the party's constitution and regulations adopted in 1988-89. In 1990 the Central Committee was established with 80 members in order to implement the policies of the CEC. However, due to arrests of many of its members by the authorities in 1997, it became inactive and obsolete. Previously, the majority of the Central Committee was composed of MPs-elect, but according to party officials, the possibility of including other active party members (non MPs-elect) has been suggested and thus increasing the number of members to 120. Furthermore, the selection and scrutinizing of new members will be

¹ Win Tin permitted to travel outside Rangoon - <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/3398-win-tin-permitted-to-travel-outside-rangoon.html>. (Mizzima), 19 Jan 2010.

² USDA woos Muslims in Kachin state ahead of elections- <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/3422-usda-woos-muslims-in-kachin-state-ahead-of-elections.html>. (Mizzima), 22 Jan 2010.

based on three basic principles of loyalty, capability and being active in party affairs. Arrangements are being made for nominations of members from all 14 states and divisions after which a decision will be taken on the issue of the new Central Committee membership.³

ANALYSIS

The lifting of travel restrictions and allowing NLD member Win Tin to travel outside Rangoon for the first time since his release in September 2008 can be seen in two different ways; Win Tin's trip could serve as a propaganda stunt for the regime in projecting itself as being obliging, while also being used as an attempt to convince opposition parties to join the elections. Whatever the reasons, Win Tin and the NLD will no doubt have benefitted from the trip and will be hoping that the generals will be generous enough to remove other restrictive measures imposed on opposition party leaders as well as releasing all political prisoners in the coming months. While hopes of releasing political prisoners and demands remain, the decision by the Central Executive Committee to reconstitute its depleted Central Committee has been welcomed within the NLD ranks. The new formation and set-up will not only enhance the party's organizational structure but will also increase the existing membership from 80 to 120 allowing for broader participation in the Central Committee's activities. The USDA's appointment of a former party official and brother of Brig-Gen Thein Zaw, Minister for Post and Telecommunication, can be seen as a wise choice and in the eyes of some more strategic. Khin Maung Latt's tenure as Secretary of Myitkyina Township Council as well as being the brother of Thein Zaw may have been the underlying factor in convincing the USDA in entrusting him the task to woo the local Muslim community for support and to vote for their candidates. However, other key factors, notably the position taken by the majority Christian population as well as the role of ethnic national parties could determine the election outcome and electoral landscape in the Kachin State. And thus in anticipation of this likely scenario, the USDA has taken the initiative to woo the Muslim community in Myitkyina.

³ NLD to form new Central Committee - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=17624. (Irrawaddy), 20 Jan 2010.