
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 1

SHAN REPS TO RECEIVE POLICY TRAINING

All elected representatives from the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) are to receive legal and policy training from a Rangoon-based NGO before the parliaments are set to convene in early 2011. Chairman U Sai Aik Paung said the party's 57 representatives-elect would travel to Rangoon early this year to participate in the training and that it would help them to amend outdated laws and to enact new ones in the parliaments. Legislation concerning monetary and business issues will be a particular focus of the training, he added.¹

RNDP SETS UP BUSINESS COMPANY

The Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) has plans to set up a company with the aim of fundraising for party activities and social affairs according to party chairman Dr. Aye Maung. "We are now preparing to set up a business company for our party funds. We will set up the company by the name of 'Thiri Waisa', but the process is now underway," he said. RNDP won 35 seats in the recent election in Rakhine State, but the party is facing a financial crisis that is limiting its ability to carry out party activities. "The party central committee already set up a business company in the last meeting in order to overcome the financial crisis. We are going to work in at least six business sectors such as construction, tourism, fishery, and timber. The company is to be based in Rakhine State will work as state whole company," said Dr. Aye. Some well-known businessmen in the party will lead the company and they are now looking for partners to invest in shares in the company. "We are now also discussing with some lawyers to set up the business. We hope we can register the company early next year. Afterward, we will implement our business," he added. The party will use 25 percent of the profits from the company to fund party activities, providing education to poor students and providing relief aid in natural disasters.²

INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES CONTEMPLATING FORMING NEW POLITICAL PARTY

A small group of 15 independent candidates who participated in the 7 November elections in 2010 are now engaged in discussions with the aim of forming a new political party. U Kaung Myint Htut, who contested as an independent candidate in South Okklapa constituency in Yangon Region, is among those included in a recently formed steering committee by the group, whose main task will include party registration and other administrative matters. Members of the newly formed group include Dr. Saw Naing, Daw Khin Thein Win, U Kyaw Kyaw Minn and U Tin Aye, as well as members of the Myanmar Democracy Congress party. The party will focus on educating the public on the dynamics of politics, with the aim of gaining their participation in the political process.³

NDF DRAFTS BILLS TO SUBMIT TO PARLIAMENT

Leaders of the National Democratic Force (NDF) are preparing a set of draft bills for the upcoming newly elected parliament despite its widespread defeat in the 7 November elections. NDF leaders said they are in the process of drafting about 35 parliamentary bills, 10 of which would be submitted in the parliament, which according to local sources is likely to be convened in later part of January 2011. The party leaders said the bills are focused on creating improved changes in the country's

¹ Shan reps to receive policy training - <http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/554/news55402.html> (Myanmar Times) 20 December 2010

² RNDP Sets up Business Company - <http://www.narinjara.com/details.asp?id=2834> (Narinjara) 20 December 2010.

³ Independent candidates engaged in forming new political party - <http://www.myanmar.mmtimes.com/2010/news/498/news08.html> (Myanmar Times) 20 December 2010

economic, social and health sectors, and one of the bills would call for the release of all political prisoners in the country. "A parliamentary member has a right to submit a bill, but how much it will get support in the parliament would be a different story," said NDF Chairman Dr. Than Nyein. In the election, the NDF won only 12 seats in the bicameral parliament, yet it is set to press forward with its stated agenda of working towards amendments to the controversial Constitution from within the parliament.⁴

USDP MEMBERS TO BE APPOINTED TO LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) which has been declared the winner of the 7 November elections, is now making plans to appoint many of its members to positions within the local administrative authorities at village, township and district levels. Local Township Peace and Development Council (TPDC) and Ward/Village Peace and Development Council (WPDC/VPDC) offices have been instructed to compile names of hard-core party members as well as retired military personnel. According to a USDP official, positions in ward and village authorities will be chosen from the hard-core members, while party members from the state/region as well as retired military personnel will be appointed to township and district administrative bodies.⁵

USDP FILES LAWSUITS ALLEGING VOTE RIGGING

Three Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) candidates have filed lawsuits accusing the winning candidates of vote rigging in the election on 7 November. Sai Kham Hlaing, a USDP candidate who competed in Kunhing Township for a State and Region Parliament (1) seat, filed a lawsuit against Sai Moon, the winning candidate representing the Shan Nationalities Development Party (SNDP). Sai Saung See, a spokesperson and deputy SNDP chairman, said the SNDP had not violated any rules in the election process and that the accusations are groundless and he [Kham Hlaing] must show evidence. "The case is now being examined in Nay Pyi Taw," Sai Saung See said. Kham Hlaing alleged that 50 SNDP members organized within 500 yards of a polling station and that the SNDP also worked with members of the local people's militia, which was transformed from Shan State Army Brigade-7 to put pressure on local residents to vote for the SNDP according to a letter the Election Commission (EC) sent to Sai Moon. An official poll watcher in Kunhing Township, however, said that "In fact, the SNDP lost in the area controlled by SSA Brigade-7." Kham Hlaing has been slated to become Chief Minister of State had he won in the election, according to USDP sources. SNDP candidate Sai Tun Kyi, who ran for State and Region Parliament (2) in Kunhing Township, also filed a lawsuit against Sai Nu, the winning USDP candidate, accusing him of vote rigging.

In the pre-election period, the USDP and the authorities were collecting advance pro-USDP votes through intimidation in many rural areas across Shan State, according to sources. The SNDP, the largest ethnic party contesting in the election in Shan State, complained to the EC about vote rigging in advanced voting but no action has been taken in response to the allegations. The SNDP won 57 of the 156 constituencies it contested in the 7 November election. Most of the constituencies were in Shan and Kachin states.⁶

⁴ NDF Draft Bills to Submit to Parliament - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20351 (Irrawaddy) 20 December 2010

⁵ USDP members to be appointed to local administrative bodies - <http://www.bur.irrawaddy.org/index.php/news/5297-2010-12-21-09-03-42> (Irrawaddy) 21 December 2010

⁶ USDP Files Lawsuits Alleging Vote Rigging - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=20367 (Irrawaddy) 22 December 2010

BURMA'S NEW PARLIAMENTS WILL CONVENE IN JANUARY: USDP MP-ELECT

Burma's parliaments will be convened with representatives elected in the 7 November election before the end of January, according to an elected representative of the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Khin Shwe, a USDP candidate who was elected to the national parliament from a constituency of Rangoon Region, disclosed the information to the media after attending a two-day party meeting in Nay Pyi Taw from 22 to 23 December. "The People's Parliament will be convened first around the middle of next month, then the National Parliament about seven days later, and lastly, the Union Parliament (joint session of the two), seven days following that," said Khin Shwe. He also said that representatives also discussed the restructuring and democratisation of the party as it was originally a "social" association which inherited both its strengths and shortcomings. "The main issues that we discussed were about how we should behave when we become Members of Parliament and about the restructuring of the USDP," he said.⁷

MON PARTY HOLDS PRE-PARLIAMENT MEETING

The All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), which won 16 parliamentary seats in the 7 November elections, held a two-day meeting in Mawlamyaing capital of Mon State at the end of December. Discussions on the constitution, as well as the matters relating to the convening of the new parliaments to be convened later this month were high on the agenda. "We held discussions with two legal consultants," said party chairman Nai Ngwe Thein. "There are many things to discuss [in the parliament] – everything including the economy, politics and social issues, although we are not sure whether [they] will be accepted or not, but we do hope so. Our country has been without a parliament for many years and we hope that political prisoners will be released around the opening of the parliament. We are also likely to make a demand for that." Although it is claimed that the parliament will be convened by the end of January 2011, no preparation for such a procedure has been seen in Mon State, Nai Ngwe Thein added.⁸

ANALYSIS

Though the date for convening the first session of the Hluttaw (Parliament) has yet to be confirmed, sources within the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) have publicly stated that it would take place in late January this year. The steps taken by the USDP to hold coordination meetings are precursors for convening of the parliamentary assemblies. Once again, this reflects the unpredictable nature of the junta in running the state of affairs and it is most certain that this practice will continue to persist. Under such conditions, opposition parties should explore ways to counter the military's unjust and unfair tactics if they are serious in playing an active and effective role in the political process. The recent meeting held by the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) should be seen as a constructive step, and other opposition parties should do likewise as they prepare for the convening of the parliamentary assemblies. While the realities of the proceedings of the events in the parliaments remain uncertain, lawsuits between elected candidates are popping up all over the place with USDP candidates at the centre of attention. Though the outcome of the complaints remains unclear, the notion of allowing such cases to be filed in itself should be seen positive. Some may still argue that these small steps are but normal in democratic states and therefore insignificant. Whatever view and opinion one may have on these issues, one of the most important and undisputed facts is that the future of Burma lies in the hands of its own people.

⁷ Burma's new parliaments will convene in January: USDP MP-elect – <http://www.dvb.no/elections/burma%E2%80%99s-new-parliaments-will-convene-in-january-usdp-mp-elect/13520> (DVB) 27 December 2010

⁸ Mon party holds pre-parliament meeting - <http://www.dvb.no/news/mon-party-holds-pre-parliament-meeting/13553> (DVB) 29 December 2010