
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 27

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CEASEFIRE MONITORING JOINT COMMITTEE MEETS

Representatives from the government and the 8 EAOs signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) held a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) meeting in Yangon on 28 October. It is the first meeting of the committee after its formation, according to the MPC's Senior Advisor Hla Maung Shwe. Following the NCA signing, the committee was formed along with the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) during the three-day Joint implementation Coordination Meeting (15-17 Oct) in Nay Pyi Taw. The JMC will be responsible for dealing with military matters, while the UPDJC will deal with political issues. According to the NCA, ceasefire monitoring activities will be undertaken transparently and responsibly to ensure strict adherence to the military Code of Conduct agreed to by all signatories. Once finalised, the Code of Conduct will use clearly-worded language, as will the monitoring guidelines for Union, state and regional level committees. These are to be completed within 30 days of the NCA signing. Likewise, the ceasefire signatories will have to establish a Framework for a Political Dialogue within 60 days and hold political dialogue within 90 days, in accordance with the NCA.¹

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WELCOMES NCA

The United States commended all sides for their ongoing efforts to bring an end to the longest-running civil conflict in the world. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the signing of a ceasefire agreement in Myanmar as "a milestone" and expressed his hope that the new government formed after next month's elections will keep moving forward along the present path of negotiations. The French Embassy in Yangon on 16 October, welcomed the signing of the NCA. This is an important step in the peace process initiated almost three years ago in Myanmar, it said. It also stated "We call on the parties to continue on the path of dialogue, which is the only way to restore trust, ensure the protection of minorities and bring peace to the entire country."²

ADVANCE VOTE EXTENSION: GOVERNMENT PLEDGES TO RESOLVE COMPLAINTS FROM OVERSEAS

Nearly 6,600 overseas voters casted advance votes on 18 October for the upcoming general election of 8 November. Since advance voting began on 13 October, the total number of overseas voters rose to 17,498. About 18 overseas polling stations have been established at Myanmar embassies and consulates abroad. Some overseas voters expressed criticisms about the inconveniences they encountered while attempting to cast a vote for the historic election, which is the first open general election in 25 years. Following the beginning of the advance voting period for overseas Myanmar nationals, the Union Election Commission requested on 16 October that voters be patient, as such processes are new to Myanmar. A ballot with a signature of an official of a Myanmar embassy is considered a valid vote, according to UEC. The statement issued by UEC also urged overseas Myanmar nationals who could not cast advance votes during the slated period to obtain recommendations from embassy officials to qualify them to cast their votes again on Election Day. However such voters must be in Myanmar on 8 November.

The government has said that it plans to extend the 23 October deadline for advance voting abroad at a number of Myanmar embassies following complaints by frustrated overseas voters. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is coordinating with the Union Election Commission (UEC) to extend the deadline for

¹ Ceasefire monitoring joint committee meets today –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 October 2015 (p. 1)

² US, UN, EU, France welcome NCA –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 October 2015 (p. 2)

the advance voting, especially at Myanmar embassies in Singapore and Tokyo said Deputy Minister Foreign Minister Thant Kyaw. He said the goal is to ensure that the eligible voters can cast their ballots in time for the advance voting. He acknowledged that a significant number of complaints had been received from voters abroad who had been issued with less than the three stipulated ballot papers, or were denied the right to vote because their details were not recorded in voters' lists. A contributing factor was the UEC's confusion over incomplete addresses being given, as well as when voters living overseas failed to include the full details of their address outside Myanmar, the Deputy Minister said. Some major administrative errors were also made. "For example, the ballots for the Myanmar Embassy in Tokyo were sent to its Embassy in Egypt," he said. The ministry sent ballots to the country's 44 embassies abroad for more than 29,000 people deemed eligible to vote by the UEC. The Foreign Ministry has received the list of overseas voters from 2 embassies who have not voted yet thought they were included in the voters' list and also received 34,747 proposals for advance voting from Myanmar people overseas. The proposals were then forwarded to the UEC. More than 19,800 overseas voters had casted advance votes up to 19 October, according to the Ministry.

Thant Kyaw requested international observers and diplomats to observe the Vienna Convention and not to interfere in internal affairs of Myanmar on Election Day. Chairman of the Union Election Commission Tin Aye met with representatives from the 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and discussed issues related to the general elections and political campaigning in areas inhabited by the minority ethnic groups. The UEC Chairman also held a meeting with representatives from political parties, civil society organisations and international organisations in Yangon and urged them to follow the codes of ethics and the Election Law while observing the election.³

HEAD OF EU'S ELECTION OBSERVER MISSION HOLDS HIGH-LEVEL TALKS IN NAY PYI TAW

The Deputy Speaker of the European Parliament and Head of the EU's Election Observer Mission (EU EOM) in Myanmar, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff held high-level meetings in Nay Pyi Taw on 19 October concerning the upcoming election. The EU EOM delegation met the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing who said that the role of the Tatmadaw (military) is to ensure free and fair elections. Lambsdorff also discussed the general election of 8 November with Union Election Commission chairman Tin Aye and Union Parliament Speaker Thura Shwe Mann. Topics discussed included advance voting, observation arrangements, implementing a strategic plan for to ensure a free and fair election, the settlement of disputes between political parties during the campaign period, increasing voter participation and the recent signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement.⁴

EU MISSION WILL NOT INTERFERE IN ELECTION PROCESS: CHIEF OBSERVER

The Head of the European Union's Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) is solely focused on the credibility of Myanmar's general election of 8 November and it will not engage in partisan activities, said Chief Observer Alexander Graf Lambsdorff at a press conference on 20 October. We do not care who wins the elections: what we do care about is to ensure the election is credible and transparent," the mission chief said. "Another thing we will not do is take instructions from anyone; whether it be an EU institution, a member state, a Myanmar government agency, the Election Commission or what

³ Advance Vote Extension: Government pledges to resolve complaints from overseas – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 October 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
Votes from Afar: Almost 18,000 votes cast abroad in less than a week – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 October 2015 (p. 1)/
No Bias in Advance Voting: Advance votes exceed 11,900 from 13 to 17 October – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 October 2015 (p. 1)

⁴ Head of EU's election observer mission holds high-level talks in the capital – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 October 2015 (p. 3)

not. "The mission chief, also said that the EU's Observer Mission will not interfere in electoral processes. "These are the elections of the Myanmar people. We are observers. We will not interfere if we see something that we believe does not correspond to international standards or some regulations." He explained that the mission of election observation will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the electoral process — prior to, on and after the general election of 8 November. The mission will issue a preliminary statement 2 days after the elections and a final report with technical recommendations for future elections will be published three-to-four months after the election, he told the press conference. Voting, counting and tabulation of results, the resolution of election related disputes will be included in the mission's analysis. During his five-day visit to Myanmar, Lamsdorff also met with the leaders of the country's two major parties, the USDP and NLD, and representatives from civil society groups and also observed political candidates' campaigning in Yangon and Mandalay regions. He told the media that the Commander-in-Chief agreed that the election observation team should have access to military polling stations to observe voting procedures. He said that the EU team of 150 observers will travel widely to carry out their duties, including regions inhabited by ethnic minority groups. The EU's Election Observation Mission arrived in Myanmar on 26 September with a core team of 8 analysts. 30 Long-Term Observers were deployed on 11 October. Another 62 Short-Term Observers, together with a delegation comprising members of the European Parliament and EU diplomats, will be present in Myanmar on the day of the election, according to a press release issued at the press conference.⁵

US DEPUTY NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

Deputy National Security Advisor to the US President, Ben Rhodes held a press conference on his visit to Myanmar at the American Centre in Yangon on 20 October. At the press conference, he said that Myanmar was in the process of the transition in its reform and he had visited Myanmar during President Obama's tour to the country last November. His visit this time coincided with signing of ceasefire agreement and preparations for election on 8 November, he added. He said that the country and the people were going through an important period and the elections would be inclusive. He pointed out that it was necessary for the election to be transparent and Myanmar would be able to make a historic milestone by allowing the people to fully express their will. Focusing on elections, he was able to meet with election commission and it was necessary to settle election disputes in accordance with the law, he said. He said it was important for all to accept the outcome of the election but the political process would not end on completion of the elections and efforts must be made to form a new government. Assessments of international observers were also important, he said. Rhodes also pointed out the importance of role of religions of minorities and said that his country was worried about religious instigations.

The nationwide ceasefire agreement was very important for the country and was the first step toward national reconciliation and he expressed his belief that implementation of the truce would be successful and Myanmar would see real development. He also said that it was necessary for remaining ethnic groups to cooperate in the process and efforts must be made for stability and peace in Rakhine State. He also said that President Obama had recognized that political transition of Myanmar was a complicated process and it would take time to overcome challenges of Myanmar as they could not be overcome overnight. He said that positive signs could be seen in political development of Myanmar and it was encouraging to see political parties, individual candidates and the people were enthusiastic about the democratic transition while the media were also cooperating in the process by reporting news in accordance with the freedom of expression.⁶

⁵ EU mission will not interfere in election process: chief observer – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 October 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

⁶ US Deputy National Security Advisor holds press conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 October 2015 (p. 2)

BOMB BLAST AT CHIN NATIONAL FRONT'S LIAISON OFFICE

The second attack on CNF's office this year may have been motivated by displeasure over the group signing the ceasefire last week, says the party head. A bomb exploded at the Chin National Front's liaison office in Chin State on 19 October, causing extensive damage but not resulting in human injuries, according to a report published by the Chinland Guardian. The home-made bomb exploded in Tedim Township, northern Chin State, at around 11.15pm. The liaison office has 9 staff, however no one was present at the time of the explosion. "This is obviously orchestrated by some entities or individuals who have misgivings about the recent signing of the NCA [Nation-wide Ceasefire Agreement]. Of course, there are a number of elements that might be to blame – and no one has taken responsibility for it as yet," said Chin National Front (CNF) spokesperson Dr Sui Khar. The CNF, which was founded in 1988, was one of eight ethnic armed groups who signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) last week. The explosion shattered windows, walls and destroyed furniture in the top level of the three-storey building, which is also occupied by the owner's family. A local shop in the same building was also damaged. This is the second time this year that CNF's liaison office has been targeted by bombings. In March, a bomb exploded but there were no injuries. No arrests were made, however some suggested that tensions over whether to use 'Zomi' or 'Chin' to refer to the ethnic minority group were at play, as the first bomb was detonated two days before the nationwide census in March 2015, which was the first to take place in more than 30 years and did not include the term 'Zomi.'⁷

GOVT URGES DIPLOMATS, OBSERVERS TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT ELECTION OBSERVATION

The government has requested diplomats and foreign election observers to refrain from activities that could be construed as being biased or that may negatively impact the country's ability to hold free and fair elections. At a meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw on 23 October with diplomatic corps based in Yangon and those concurrently accredited to Myanmar, as well as representatives from foreign election commissions, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin said that the diplomatic community has an obligation to abide by the Union Election Commission's (UEC) Code of Conduct. He said it also has an obligation to adhere to the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and called for the cooperation and support of the diplomatic community for holding of general elections that are peaceful, credible and transparent. The Election Commission Chairman Tin Aye, also pledged that the upcoming election will ensure transparency and be devoid of bias. A total of 6,065 candidates will compete for the seats in parliament. Male candidates make up the 86.8 percent of the total with 5,274 and women making up the rest with 800 (13.2%), according to statistics from the UEC. Meanwhile, more than 1.03 million people who have been residing outside their constituencies submitted their applications to their ward and village constituencies in order to cast their ballots on the November 8 election from constituencies where they are currently staying, according to the UEC.⁸

FOLLOW THE LAW : UEC URGES POLITICAL PARTIES TO PREVENT CONFLICT

The Union Election Commission (UEC) requested on 26 October that political parties and candidates oversee their political campaigns and to follow the law in order to prevent conflicts. The UEC announcement stated that as the 8 November election is drawing near, the increasing tempo of political campaigns might cause conflicts due to confrontations. Political campaigns need to be kept under special supervision by political parties and candidates in order to prevent unnecessary events impacting members of the parties and their supporters, said the statement. Sub-Election Commissions nationwide will ban campaigns that are not in conformity with the law and will take legal action against

⁷ Bomb blast at Chin National Front's liaison office –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 October 2015 (p. 5)

⁸ Govt urges diplomats, observers to be cautious about election observation –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 October 2015 (p. 1)

the personnel concerned if necessary. The UEC and its Sub-Election Commissions, which are obliged to hold elections freely and fairly, will effectively supervise the political campaigns in coordination with local authorities as a precaution to prevent conflicts. Meanwhile, the UEC issued another statement on 26 October denying the request of candidates and political parties to include people who have been living outside their constituencies for more than 180 days in the voter lists of their current constituencies, as the deadline for such an arrangement had already passed. The announcement of the UEC stated that in its announcement dated 10 July 2015, urged voters to apply to Sub-Election Commissions in order to vote in the constituencies where they are currently living if they do not want to cast their votes for the election in their original constituencies. The deadline to apply expired on 10 October 2015, according to the UEC.⁹

UEC CANCELS ELECTIONS IN FOUR TOWNSHIPS, SHAN STATE

The Union Election Commission (UEC) announced on 27 October that they will not hold the 8 November election in 2 townships nor in several village-tracts of another 2 townships in Shan State on the grounds that the region lacks stability. The UEC statement said that elections will not be held in Mongshu Township, Kehsi Township, 8 village-tracts in Tangyang Township, 5 wards and 37 village-tracts in Namtit of Hopang Township as the situation in those areas calls into question the freedom and fairness in which the upcoming election can be held. The Shan State Nationalities Democratic Party-SNDP requested on 19 October that the UEC suspend the election in 3 townships — Mongshu, Kehsi and Tangyang — in eastern Shan State due to conflict between the Tatmadaw and local armed ethnic groups. A follow-up letter from the SNDP, signed by the party's general secretary Sai Hla Kyaw, requested that the UEC resume the election in the 3 townships once stability had been restored. Locals said that they did not believe a free election was possible in their area as they are currently displaced by the fighting. Meanwhile, the UEC announced that it would allow civil service personnel, who will be working on the day of the election, to cast advanced votes as of this Thursday 28 October if they apply to do so with the relevant ward/village sub-election commissions. Those who will be on duty on election day will be allowed to cast their votes for the upcoming election on 6 and 7 November, according to the UEC. Two members of a ward/village sub-election commission will be sent to visit those who cannot get themselves to a polling station in order to collect advanced votes from them.¹⁰

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION SUBMITS APPEAL TO PARDON POLITICAL PRISONERS AND DETAINED STUDENTS

Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) sent an appeal on 27 October to the President to pardon political prisoners, detained students and supporters, according to the statement of the commission. In its statement, the commission said that the Multi-party Democracy General election would be held on 8 November and the Union Election Commission was endeavouring their best to hold free and fair election in conformity with the law and that the UEC has also requested responsible organizations and the public to extend their cooperation for the elections, the statement said.¹¹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

RCSS VOWS RESTRAINT DURING ELECTION PERIOD

The Restoration Council for Shan State (RCSS), one of Myanmar's strongest armed groups says it will do its best to prevent the outbreak of fighting during the election period. The comments were made

⁹ Follow the Law : UEC urges political parties to prevent conflict – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-27-red.pdf> (GNLM) 27 October 2015 (p.)

¹⁰ Regional Strife Bars Polls : UEC decides not to hold election in four townships – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 October 2015 (p. 1)

¹¹ Human rights commission submits appeal to pardon political prisoners, detained students, supporters to president – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-10-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 October 2015 (p. 3)

by Sai Oo, Director of the group's Liaison Office in Taunggyi, Shan State. Whether future battles occur rests largely on the Myanmar army and the government he said. Sai Oo made the remarks during a press conference on the nationwide ceasefire agreement that was recently signed by the RCSS which is also known as the Shan State Army - South (SSA-S). Lieutenant General Yawd Serk leader of the RCSS who also attended the conference called for the army to avoid clashes. "Our view is that the [Myanmar] Armed Forces must have the courage to change. They must have the courage to replace former methods with newer ones. We believe the military leaders have the desire to make changes," Yawd Serk said. On 16 September, the RCSS issued an announcement telling political parties not to campaign in 16 townships under its territory and issued another announcement on 16 October to tell the parties that they could do their campaigning because of better security in the area.¹²

NEARLY 3,000 DISPLACED AS SHAN STATE OFFENSIVE CONTINUES

Over 2,700 people have now fled their homes as clashes between the military and Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) resumed from 18 to 19 October, according to local civil society groups. At least 8 villages in Kyethi Township have been totally abandoned after a government forces bombarded with artillery and gunfire in Kyethi and Mong Hsu Townships, according to Sai Zu of the Shan Youth Network, who said that an additional 1,200 people had been displaced since a temporary cessation in hostilities last week. "Wan Zau monastery has 1500 people, Hai Pa monastery has 1200 people, and Mongnawng has over 100 people," adding that many of those displaced were women and children. "They do not have enough food. There is no refugee camp here. It is very hard for them." Hla Shwe Thein, who is helping with relief efforts in Kyethi, said he had heard that two elderly villagers had been left behind during the evacuation of the villages, including a 102-year-old man. Over the course of half an hour on 18 October, Hla Shwe Thein said the government forces fired a massive artillery bombardment from a base in Mongnawng, directed at nearby villages. On 6 October, government troops launched an assault on the SSA-N headquarters in Wan Hai village, Mong Hsu Township, in response to the ethnic armed group's refusal to vacate its strategic river port base in Kyethi Township's Tar San Pu village. SSA-N spokesman Colonel Sai Hla said the group's forces made a tactical retreat from Tar San Pu in order to bring an end to the fighting. The SSA-N, the armed wing of the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), declined to participate in the "nationwide" ceasefire agreement, signed by the government and representatives of 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).¹³

UEC RECEIVES MORE THAN 6,000 OBSERVER APPLICATIONS

More than 6,000 election observers from 9 local organisations have applied to the Union Election Commission (UEC), said chairperson Tin Aye. The number of applicants has reached 6,261. Observers must apply to the UEC by 24 October. The UEC has given the green light to 202 observers from 3 international organisations. "The election-monitoring organisations and observers need to follow ethics and the existing laws, without disrupting the secret-voting system, polling officers and voters," Tin Aye added. A domestic election observation organisation, the People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE), is monitoring campaigning in 110 townships with 110 observers. It will deploy 2,000 observers on 8 November with a monitoring system used in 50 countries.¹⁴

¹² RCSS Vows Restraint during Election Period – <http://mizzima.com/news-election-2015-election-news/rcss-vows-restraint-during-election-period> (Mizzima) 21 October 2015

¹³ Nearly 3,000 Displaced as Shan State Offensive Continues – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/nearly-3000-displaced-as-shan-state-offensive-continues.html> (the Irrawaddy) 19 October 2015

¹⁴ UEC receives more than 6,000 observer applications – <http://www.dvb.no/news/uec-receives-more-than-6000-observer-applications-burma-myanmar/58412> (DVB) 22 October 2015

ANALYSIS

More than 6,000 candidates from more than 90 political parties, many of them representing ethnic minorities who comprise nearly 40 percent of the population, will be competing for 498 seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) in the highly anticipated and much publicised Myanmar elections on 8 November. Irrespective of the outcome of the election, the holding of the elections itself should be seen as milestone for Myanmar's emerging democracy and will have significant ramifications for its democratic reform process. To date, there is significant improvement in the conduct of the elections in sharp contrast to the previous elections in 2010. The election will also be the first and most competitive of its kind for over fifty years. This election should be taken seriously as a test to seek the genuine desire and will of the people. The government and its election watchdog have vowed to conduct free and fair elections. Their credibility and promises will become more clearer in the coming days. But however well-conducted these elections may turn out to be, it will not lead to transformational changes as many are expecting and hoping for. In this context the elections are just one pivotal and integral step in Myanmar's path to democratic transition.