
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 28

PRO-JUNTA GROUP TO GUARD BALLOTS

Members of the junta proxy Union and Solidarity Development Association (USDA) are being trained for their role in monitoring ballot boxes during Burma's elections this year. Workshops are being conducted in Rangoon, Mandalay and Sagaing Divisions as well as in Shan, Mon and Rakhine States by the Union Election Commission (UEC), according to a retired government official from Sagaing. The UEC has been conferred with supreme authority in overseeing the elections scheduled to take place later this year and such initiatives in entrusting the USDA with overseeing polling station duties will likely heighten fears about the integrity of the elections due the USDA's close affiliation with the government. Phyo Min Thein of the Union Democracy Party believes that the motivation in providing training to ward-level Election Commission members is to make sure the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) party wins the elections. This is the political party that is backed by the military junta and was formed from USDA members. The same training is also being given to village-, ward- and town-level government authorities, as well as to judges and administrators in Taunggyi, Shan State.¹

DEMONSTRATION SESSION OF POLLING STATION CONDUCTED IN RANGOON

A practical demonstration session on the functions and procedures of electoral polling stations was conducted on the school premises of State High School No. (1) Kyimyindine in Rangoon Division on 12 June. The briefing was attended by Union Election Commission Chairman, U Thein Soe, and members of division, district and township election commission officials from Rangoon Division and invited guests. Also present were representatives from the Karen and Rakhine communities in Rangoon Division. Those present at the briefing session were given a detailed demonstration on the various forms of voting methods to be used during the elections at polling stations. According to the rules and regulations of the electoral process, polling station officials will be required to count votes in the presence of voters to avoid misconceptions and vote rigging.²

DESPITE COST, SHAN PARTY SEEKS BROAD REPRESENTATION

The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) will seek to represent Shan people living both in and outside Shan State and aims to contest up to 50 State or Regional Hluttaw (Parliament) seats in Shan and Kachin States, according to its chairman, Sai Aik Paung. Under the 2008 Constitution, ethnic groups with more than 0.1 per cent of the national population – about 57,500 people – in a single State or Division are guaranteed at least one representative in the local State and Regional Hluttaw (Parliament) and thus the party is also planning to field candidates in Rangoon and Mandalay where sizeable numbers of Shan nationals live. However, one area where disparities are already emerging is party funding. U Sai Aik Paung said the SNDP was still trying to figure out how it could come up with the money to nominate and support candidates for 50 seats. "It is going to cost us a lot to take part and we still need a lot more money. Now, we are doing everything with our own funds and we have not decided whether to charge membership fees. We are thinking of trying to find donors and if there are not enough donors, the candidate will have to provide money to pay for their own

¹ Pro-junta group to guard ballots - <http://www.dvb.no/elections/pro-junta-group-to-guard-ballots/10228> (DVB) 14 June 2010

² Demonstration session of polling station conducted in Rangoon - http://www.news-eleven.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3443:yangon-election-demonstrate&catid=43:2009-11-10-07-39-09&Itemid=111 (Eleven Journal) 18 June 2010

campaigns.” Presently the party has 15 committee members and this will soon expand to 22, he said.³

REGISTERED PARTIES BEGIN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Registered political parties are now officially opening party offices as well as embarking on campaign activities in preparing to contest the polls. The Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP) has started campaigning in Mandalay, Sagaing and Ayerwaddy Divisions according to party Chairman, Aye Lwin. While campaigning has begun, the party has also taken measures to raise much needed funds and has introduced a fee of 500 Kyats (US \$ 0.50) to become a party member and a monthly membership fee of 100 kyats (US\$ 0.10). The head of the Union Democratic Party (UDP) Phyo Min Thein recently started a 100-day election campaign trail in Mandalay, Sagaing and Magwe Divisions, while U Shwe Ohn, another UDP member, has been entrusted with campaigning in Taunggyi, Shan State. For the Difference and Peace Party (DPP), the registration of party members, the nomination of candidates and the wider dissemination of publications on the party’s political objectives have become its main priorities. The party has been able to enrol the 1,000 members as prescribed by the Election Commission and thus achieved its first step of its election campaign targets and is now entering the second and third stages. The DPP party is planning to contest the elections in Bogalaye Township, Ayerwaddy Division since it has already been successful in registering 1,000 party members there and has plans to officially open its party headquarters during the third week of June according to party leader, Nay Myo Wai.⁴

POLITICAL PARTIES AFRAID TO CAMPAIGN IN SHAN STATE SOUTH

Political parties planning to compete in Shan State South, where most of the countryside is under the anti-Naypyitaw Shan State Army (SSA) South’s control, are reportedly feeling nervous about campaigning in the area after the group issued a statement that it was against any party set up to contest in the elections planned by the military regime. “Every party including the Shan party is concerned about the SSA’s possible reaction,” said a member of Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) who requested anonymity. “They are afraid to campaign not only in the outskirts but even downtown,” he said. On 26 May, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the political wing of the SSA South, announced that it would not “support and recognize” the upcoming 2010 elections and that it is also against new parties being set up to contest the elections. It said, “Shan State citizens who are standing for elections for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the offshoot of the Union Solidarity and Development Association, and the (former Burma Socialist Program Party turned) National Unity Party (NUP) will not also be recognized and supported by the RCSS.” Due to the announcement, there have not been many reports of campaigns in Shan State South up to this day, the source added. So far, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO), the Inn National Development Party (INDP), the Lahu National Development Party (LNDP), the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the National Unity Party (NUP) have plans to contest the polls in Shan State South.⁵

³ Despite cost, Shan party seeks broad representation - <http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/527/news002.html> (Myanmar Times) 14 June 2010

⁴ Registered parties begin election campaign - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/bur/index.php/news/1-news/3375-2010-06-14-12-26-58> (Irrawaddy) 14 June 2010

⁵ Political parties afraid to campaign in Shan state south - http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3066:political-parties-afraid-to-campaign-in-shan-state-south&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 15 June 2010

SNDP OPENS PARTY OFFICE IN MUSE

After successfully opening its party offices in Namkham, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) has been able to officially open another office in Kaung-hmu-lon Ward, Muse in Shan State North. The opening ceremony was attended by leaders of the SNDP and invited guests and local residents. The party has appointed U Sai Pho Aung (Sai Mau Kham Swet) as Chairman, Sai Pho Myat (Sai Yi Saing) as Vice-Chair, Sai Hein Pan (Sai Tun Pan) and Sai Aung Myint (Sai Sam Mein Htee) as Secretaries of the party in Muse. At present the SNDP has a membership of 200 members in Muse, and party officials are in the process of recruiting new members.⁶

PARTY PUBLICATIONS TO BE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED

Registered parties who wish to disseminate publications as part of the party's election campaign will be required to follow strict rules and make a deposit 500,000 Kyats (US\$ 500) to the Press and Scrutiny Department under the Ministry of Information, according to an official from this department. Under the present rules, parties will be given the freedom to distribute information on the condition that they do not breach the prescribed rules and regulations. Parties found to be contravening the prescribed rules will have their party publications withdrawn and their guarantee deposit confiscated. However, even after having their party publications withdrawn, parties will still have the right to re-apply for distributing publications together with a new deposit of 500,000 Kyats. Further measures imposed on parties with regards to the publication of pamphlets and information includes strict adherence to Directive 42 (dated 17 March 2010) issued by the Central Body for Supervising Registration of Printers and Publishers and Scrutinisation of Literary Works, and based on the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law. However, to date, this directive remains classified. Those found to be in violation will not only have publications withdrawn but also the party's registration declared null and void. At present, the Democratic Party (Myanmar), the Union Democratic Party (UDP) and the Kayin People's Party (KPP) are amongst those which have been approved by the relevant authorities to disseminate publications.⁷

ELECTORAL PROCESS COURSES OPEN IN BAWLAKE, PHAUSAUNG, & MESAE TOWNSHIPS

The opening of an Electoral Process Course for ward and village sub-commission members, returning officer, deputy returning officer and polling booth staff was held at Bayintnaung Hall in Bawlake Township, Kayah State on 11 June, with an address by Secretary U Khin Maung Yi of the State Election Sub-commission. Courses on working guidance, laws and rules were held and attended by a total of 10 trainees. Similarly, at the Phahsaung Basic Education High School, the opening of Electoral Process Course for ward and village-tract sub-commission members of Phahsaung Township and Mesae Township, returning officer, deputy returning officer and polling booth staff was held on the following day. A total of 85 trainees attended this course.⁸

NEW APPROVED APPLICATIONS TO REGISTER AS A POLITICAL PARTY

The newest party to submit an application to register as a political party to the Union Election Commission is the Kaman National Progressive Party, which submitted its application on 16 June. Of the 34 parties that have submitted applications for registration as a political party, the Union Election Commission (UEC) has most recently approved the registration of the Ethnic National Development Party (ENDP), also on 16 June. To date, there are 42 parties that have submitted

⁶ SNDP opens party office in Muse - <http://www.mongloi.org/burmese/2008-08-01-03-22-02/85-2008-08-01-03-14-40/910-2010-06-15-10-16-12> (Mongloi) 15 June 2010

⁷ Party publications to be tightly controlled - <http://www.khitpyaing.org/index.php?route=detail&id=2497> (New Era) 17 June 2010

⁸ Electoral process courses open in Bawlake, Phahsaung, Masae townships - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-06-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 June 2010

applications to form and to continue their existence as political parties. Thirty-three of the 34 parties that have submitted applications for registration as political party have been granted permission to register as political parties and the remaining are under scrutiny.⁹

ANALYSIS

Election campaigning has slowly begun with parties beginning to open party offices and commencing lobbying campaigns in areas where they plan to contest the polls. In Shan State and Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe and Ayerwaddy Divisions election campaigns have been gaining momentum, which are also areas where certain constituencies will be hotly contested. However, negativity has taken hold in Shan State South, since the Shan State Army (SSA) has openly declared that it would not recognise the elections organised by the military junta. Under such conditions, parties planning to contest the polls in Shan State South are now faced with confronting the threat and danger of the SSA militant group. Although a dark cloud of insecurity has shadowed Shan State South, the northern region of Shan State has witnessed the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) inaugurate another of its party offices in Muse, a border town close to the People's Republic of China. The SNDP party has declared its intentions to contest the polls in the Shan State as well as in other states and divisions, which once again show how seriously some parties are taking the elections, and, furthermore, is a chance to bring about democratic change in the country.

Electoral process courses continue to be conducted throughout the country under the auspices of the Union Election Commission (UEC), with the first demonstration session on the function of polling stations taking place in Rangoon. This will be one of many to come as the country prepares itself for its first elections after two decades. At present, scrutiny and control of party publications has been tightly controlled and a handful of parties have been given approval to proceed. A 500,000 Kyat deposit has also been demanded as a guarantee to ensure that parties comply with the rules and regulations. Parties falling short and failing to abide will not only have their deposit confiscated but their party registration revoked. Under such circumstances, it would be wise for parties to think twice before deciding to embark on any activities contrary to the set rules since many already face a challenge in raising the much needed funds to support not only the party but also would-be candidates. That being said, many registered parties still remain committed and focussed as they prepare for the elections later this year.

⁹ Applications for registration of political party scrutinized, passed - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-06-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 June 2010