
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 10

RAKHINE REGIONAL COMMANDER PREPARES FOR 2010 ELECTION

The military regime's campaigning for the 2010 general elections is gaining momentum in Rakhine State. At a recent meeting, Major General Thaung Aye, Commander of the Western Regional Command, directed local officials at district and township level including administrations and police forces across the state to raise funds and undertake security preparations for the forthcoming election, according to an official from the Rakhine State's Peace and Development Council. The orders were handed down by the Commander during a two-day meeting with officers held from 7 December to 8 December 2009. The official said that the commander convened the meeting in order to implement decisions made during the quarterly meeting of the junta's top brass that was held in the last week of November in Napyidaw. The official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said "I heard that the senior officers of the SPDC government had a special focus on holding the 2010 election peacefully in their recent meeting in Naypyidaw, and that one of the meeting's decisions was that every state and division has to use its own budget to hold the election in their respective regions." In order to acquire the funds needed for the elections, it is expected that the local, district, and township level authorities from the District Peace Develop Committee (DPDC) or Township Peace Develop Committee (TPDC) will resort to doubling taxes and toll fees on private businesses and municipal related services such as markets, bridges, jetty and ferry launches in the Rakhine State. The source, however, refused to elaborate further on the proposed 2010 election, for which, as of yet, no date has been set. According to a police source, the police forces are also being ordered to be fully prepared to thwart any forms of public unrest or protests, and to take in new recruits to strengthen their forces if necessary. According to an Arakanese dissident, "Though the regime is making preparations on all sides to hold the elections in 2010, local opposition Arakanese parties have been sidelined and suppressed by being labeled illegal organizations."

VOLUNTEER FIREMAN INSTRUCTED ON 2008 CONSTITUTION - SAGAING DIVISION.

While conducting volunteer fire fighting training programmes, the Burmese military regime has included instruction on the 2008 constitution to the trainees of the fire department in Kalemmyo District, Sagaing Division in Western Burma. The month-long training taught not only fire fighting but also included lessons on the 2008 constitution, said a local from Nwainpinta Block of Kalemmyo. The trainers told them to campaign for government candidates among civilians for the forthcoming 2010 general elections, and instructed them on the election chapter in the 2008 constitution. The 100 trainees included men between the ages of 16 and 45, and at least 20 men from each block were required to attend the training from the 30 blocks in Kalemmyo District. The military authorities gave the trainees 1500 kyat per day for their travel, lodging and food. However, the officials collected 2000 to 2500 kyat from each family from all the blocks

in Kalembo. Such fire fighting programmes, which include lessons on the constitution, are now being conducted in various parts of Chin State and Tamu District in Sagaing Division.

NLD PARTY REORGANISES WOMENS AFFAIRS WORKING GROUPS IN STATES AND DIVISIONS

In a bid to counter the regime's preparations for the upcoming 2010 elections, the NLD has recently commenced work to re-organise the party at the national, regional and township levels. The working groups for Women Affairs have now been re-established in South-East Township in Mandalay, Taung-dwin-gyi Township in Magway and Kawthoung in Tanintharyi Division. More Womens' Affairs Working Groups are scheduled to be re-established in the three remaining townships in Mandalay and in Pulaw and Myeik in Tanintharyi Division in the near future. The aims and objectives of these working groups are for the wider participation of women in the party's activities and affairs; promotion of women's rights; and better cooperation with counterparts in the international arena. The groups' activities were abolished and came to a halt in 1997 under the instructions of Secretary-General Aung San Suu Kyi but recently the leadership has resurrected their cause with a view to promoting the role of women in the party. Furthermore, at the regional level, the NLD party has been able to re-establish 8 township Womens' Affairs Auxiliary Groups in Rangoon Division within the past two months according to Dr. May Win Myint, member of the Central Womens' Affairs Working Group. She added, "Of the 40 townships in Rangoon Womens' Affairs Auxiliary Groups exist in 13 townships. The newly formed groups include the townships of Kawt-hmu, North Okkalapa, Mayangon, Hlaing, Thanlyin, Insein, Hlaing-tharyar and Tarmway townships." These townships are now being reorganised since they have become more or less non-operational. The constitutional committee of the Central Womens' Affairs Working Group consists of 21 members at the national level; 9 members at the state and division level; 7 members at the township level and 5 members at the village level, respectively.

ANALYSIS

Rakhine State has been one the prominent regions for the military regime and its allies to garner support for the 2010 election. Having been entrusted with mandates from the hierarchy, the local and regional commanders are to take all measures necessary to implement their orders, but at the same time promoting their own personal ambitions. Rakhine State will be one of the many closely contested regions in the elections and will remain a high priority on the agenda of the military regime due to its strategic location and vast amount of natural resources. It would prove of benefit to the junta to maintain control of the region in the future, including in assisting the regime in shaping its long-term relationship with India.

The re-establishment of NLD Womens' Affairs Working Groups at various regional and township levels can be regarded as a positive move. Although the party remains

focused on the announcement of the Election Law, while still being committed to the Shwegondine Declaration, this initiative should be welcomed as a positive step. The NLD leadership has now arrived at a point where it not only needs to adopt a clear vision and plan to implement the party's founding principles, but also needs to accommodate and fulfil the wishes of the people.