
ELECTION MONITOR NO. 46

DEMOCRATIC GROUPING SPLINTERS

A fledgling political grouping of democratic parties has been rocked by the resignation of at least two of its six members after a disagreement over funding. The Party for Democracy and Peace officially quit the “Democratic Friendship Group” on 14 October because of what a spokesperson described as the National Democratic Force’s (NDF) “unclear financial background”. A spokesperson for the Chin National Party confirmed on 16 October his party had also left the group but did not give a reason. The resignations follow a report in local media that businessman U Hla Maung Shwe, a senior member of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Myanmar Fisheries Federation, had provided funding to some candidates from the NDF and unnamed ethnic parties. The grouping, which also includes the Union Democratic Party and Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, was established on 2 October, essentially to show voters there was a viable opposition to the Union Solidarity and Development Party and National Unity Party.¹

NETWORKS NEGOTIATE ELECTION COOPERATION

Two prominent networks of independent candidates are in discussions to “work together” both before and after the 7 November election, a leading politician has said. U Yan Kyaw, one of the founders of a network of 17 independents, said at a ceremony to open the group’s “victory office” in Yangon’s North Okkalapa Township on 10 October that he expected to cooperate with the network of candidates led by Dr Phone Win and Daw Yuza Maw Htoon. Also present at the ceremony were leaders from the Democratic Party (Myanmar) and Rakhine Nationalities Development Party who had joined the network. Two of the network’s members – Pyithu Hluttaw candidate U Ba Tint Swe and Yangon Region Hluttaw candidate U Kyi Oo Thein – will stand for election in North Okkalapa, while Dr Saw Naing and U Kaung Myint Htut will contest seats in South Okkalapa. The network includes six Pyithu Hluttaw candidates, 10 State or Regional Hluttaw candidates and Amyotha Hluttaw candidate U Khin Hlaing, one of the three new members. U Khin Hlaing, the owner of Zawtica International - a Yangon-based company, will contest in Ayeyarwady Region Amyotha Hluttaw Constituency 12, which covers Labutta and Mawlamyinegyun townships.²

POLITICAL PARTIES ARE EMBRACING WEB 2.0 FOR A BROADER CANVASS

At least five political parties in Burma have created Facebook accounts and websites to canvass for votes, as they prepare themselves for the upcoming elections. Among the 37 registered parties, the National Democratic Force (NDF), Democratic Party (Myanmar), Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), Karen Progressive Party (KPP), and Peace and Diversity Party (PDP), have opened Facebook accounts through which to present party policies and canvass for votes.

According to NDF Rangoon Division canvassing committee secretary, Dr. Myat Nyan Soe, “We’ve had difficulties in launching a face-to-face electoral campaign, so we’re using Facebook to present our policies and answer questions interactively. Our fan page ... is intended for the youth.” Similarly, the Peace and Diversity Party (PDP) has also created a Facebook fan page and a party website.³

¹ Democratic grouping splinters - <http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/545/54502news.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 October 2010.

² Network mull elections cooperation - <http://www.mmtimes.com/2010/news/545/54503news.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 October 2010

³ Political parties are embracing web 2.0 for a broader canvass - <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010-/4474-political-parties-are-embracing-web-20-for-a-broader-canvass.html> (Mizzima) 20 October 2010.

UEC EXPLAINS PREPARATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS, VOTING PROCESS TO DIPLOMATS, UN REPRESENTATIVES, JOURNALISTS AND REGIONAL/STATE SUB COMMISSIONS

On 18 October, the Union Election Commission (UEC) held an event to explain preparations for the upcoming elections and to demonstrate voting process to diplomats, resident representatives of the UN agencies, journalists and Secretaries of Region/State Election Sub-commissions at the UEC meeting hall in Naypyidaw. UEC Chairman U Thein Soe gave accounts of preparations for the upcoming elections and then answered questions raised by those present. Later, a demonstration session of the voting process was given by officials.⁴

MEETINGS ON ELECTORAL PROCESS HELD IN SHAN STATE

On 9 October, members of Shan State Election Sub-commission and Kalaw Township Election Sub-commission of Taunggyi District met with members of Ward/Village tract Election Sub-commissions at the hall of a primary school in Heho. Also present were members of four village tracts Election Sub-commissions in and around Heho, polling station officers, deputy polling station officers and polling station members and town elders. Shan State Election Sub-commission members and other officials presented electoral rules and laws and preparations being made for the construction of polling stations and booths. A total 1080 people from 23 Wards and 24 Village-tracts from the local region attended similar electoral process courses in Bawsai Village-tract, Aungban, and Kalaw on 11 October.⁵

UEC MEMBER MEETS SUB-COMMISSIONS OF MANDALAY REGION, DISTRICTS AND TOWNSHIPS

U Myint Naing, the UEC member in charge of Mandalay Region, had a meeting with members of Mandalay Region/District and Township Election Sub-commissions at the office of the region's sub-commission on 11 October. After delivering an address, U Myint Naing explained the electoral process. Mandalay Region Sub-commission Chairman U Aung Htut and the chairmen of District and Township Sub-commissions reported on the progress of their work and future tasks. UEC member U Myint Naing reviewed their reports and gave a concluding speech.⁶

ANALYSIS

The newly created six-party alliance aimed at rivalling the junta-backed parties has suffered a big set back at the first hurdle. Allegations that an alliance member had received funding from a local businessman thought to be connected with the junta has created factions within the new coalition, causing the Democracy and Peace party and Chin National Party to decide to leave the group. The news will no doubt be welcomed by the junta, while on the other hand will not help to promote the common interest of the opposition parties. However, the plans of two of the major networks of independent candidates to cooperate can be seen as a positive sign.

The briefing session by the Union Election Commission (UEC) to appraise Yangon-based diplomats and UN representatives as well as the local media on the preparations for the 7 November election can be seen as mainly a propaganda stunt. With the elections drawing closer, the briefing session is a good promotional tool for the junta for promote a positive image of the elections.

⁴ UEC explains preparations for the forthcoming elections, voting process to diplomats, UN representatives, journalists and region/state sub-commissions - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2010

⁵ Meetings on electoral process held in Shan state - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 October 2010

⁶ UEC member meets sub-commissions of Mandalay region, districts and townships - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs09/NLM2010-10-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 October 2010

While the junta-backed USDP party has been given a free hand in campaigning throughout the country, many opposition parties have not been so lucky. Incidences have occurred and still continue to persist where the rules and regulations in the electoral laws have been deliberately used against opposition parties by election sub-commission officials in order to control and derail the election campaigns of opposition groups. From the outset, it has been the strategy of the military to practice such measures against the opposition in order to attain victory.

In this challenging environment, it would be in the interest of opposition parties to work together where possible, and to refrain from unearthing and exploiting each other's weaknesses, but rather resolve disputes discreetly and amicably.