
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 22

OFFICIAL MEDIA

A MILESTONE IN THE MYANMAR PEACE PROCESS— THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

On 7 August 2015, the Union Government, Hluttaw, Tatmadaw, and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) achieved a milestone in the peace process by finalizing the text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). President Thein Sein formally sent invitations to 15 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) on 18 August, 2015, to sign the NCA.

Over the last 4 years, the Government held separate talks with each of the 15 EAOs and bilateral agreements were concluded. In total, 39 agreements at the state and union levels were signed. The Government accepted the request of the EAOs to organize meetings among themselves, and provided assistance for the holding of ethnic leaders summits. The Government also agreed to discuss proposals for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement that resulted from these summits. The Union Peace-Making Work Committee (UPWC) composed of representatives from the Government, Hluttaw, and Tatmadaw, and the Ethnic Armed Organizations' Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) met over a 17-month period to finalize a mutually acceptable Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Talks began in early November 2013, and on 31 March, 2015, the draft text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, comprising 7 chapters and 33 paragraphs, was finalized. Although the government was ready to sign the Agreement, leaders of Ethnic Armed Organizations formed the Senior Delegation (SD) and requested amendments to the text of the Agreement. In the interest of achieving nationwide peace, the Government resumed negotiations, and on 7 August, 2015, all provisions of the Agreement were finalized.¹

UEC ANNOUNCES PRELIMINARY CANDIDATE LISTS

The country's 2 main political parties — the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party and the opposition National League for Democracy — will each field more than 1,000 candidates in the 8 November general election. According to preliminary candidate lists announced by the Union Election Commission, 93 political parties have nominated a total of 5,866 candidates. The ruling party accounts for 1,134 and the opposition 1,151, topping the candidate list.

The NLD did not take part in the previous general election won by the USDP in 2010. Of the ruling USDP party candidates, 318 will seek seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), 165 in the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and 651 for region and state hluttaws. NLD candidates will contest 325 seats of the Pyithu Hluttaw, 167 in the Amyotha Hluttaw and 659 for region and state hluttaws.

The National Union Party (NUP) will field the third-highest number of candidates with 763 — 208 for the Pyithu Hluttaw, 98 for the Amyotha Hluttaw and 457 for region and state hluttaws. The NUP fielded more than 900 candidates in the previous election but won only 17 seats. Including 323 independents, the total number of candidates who have registered for the election stands at 6,189. According to a UEC announcement last month, 330 constituencies will be contested in the Pyithu Hluttaw, 168 in the Amyotha Hluttaw, 644 for region and state Hluttaws and 29 for national race representatives. The UEC is currently scrutinizing the nomination of candidates from the political

¹ A milestone in the Myanmar peace process— the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 August 2015 (p.3)

parties, and a list of candidates who have passed the scrutiny process is expected to be announced late 27 August.²

GOVERNMENT ISSUES STATEMENT REGARDING USDP'S RECENT TURMOIL

The government issued Notification No.8/2015 regarding the recent incident that occurred at the headquarters of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) on 13 August, 2015. *[In that incident, the Acting USDP Chair Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Parliament, was replaced by Vice-Chair Htay Oo, after armed security forces sealed off the USDP headquarters – Ed].* The statement said that the events that took place involved the change of leadership and reorganization that are a part of a normal course of business for a registered political party. It also stated that the government is making efforts for relief and rehabilitation of flood-affected parts of the country. Concurrently, it is striving to achieve success with the peace process, and that preparations are now underway for holding of a free and fair general elections on November 8, 2015.³ *(Please see Appendix A for full statement of the Notification No. 8/2015)*

EU, MYANMAR SIGN AGREEMENT ON DEPLOYMENT OF EU ELECTION OBSERVERS

The European Union (EU) and Myanmar on 21 August signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the observation of the forthcoming elections planned for 8 November 2015. The document provides for the deployment of a full EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) in Myanmar as part of the EU's support to the country's democratic transition process. The decision to deploy an EOM follows an official invitation extended by the Myanmar authorities and enjoys the support of many other political and civil society actors. At the meeting, the EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Kobia and the Union Election Commissioner in charge of International Observation, Dr. Daw Myint Kyi signed the MoU to facilitate the deployment of the EOM, witnessed by Election Chair Tin Aye. The EOM will comprise more than 100 short and long-term observers from many of the Member States of the European Union in addition to observers from Canada, Switzerland and Norway and diplomats from embassies of EU countries accredited to Myanmar. The EOM will remain in Myanmar until the electoral process is completed. Its long-term presence will help provide an in depth-assessment of the process in line with international standards. The EU provides substantial technical and financial assistance to Myanmar and has earmarked 10 million euros (14.5 billion Myanmar Kyats) to support the country's electoral process.⁴

EU AMBASSADOR CALLS ON MYANMAR LEADERS

The EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Kobia called on Myanmar's Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 21 August in Napyitaw. During the meeting, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said peace is essential if democracy is to succeed and that national development can only be achieved in the presence of the stability brought by peace. The EU ambassador praised the military personnel and the people for their quick response to the recent floods in Myanmar. They also exchanged views on the country's peace process and the coming election. Ambassador Kobia also called on the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Thura Shwe Mann and discussed the ongoing process of democratization, a shared desire for a smooth and transparent general election and national reconciliation among the country's ethnic minority groups.⁵

² UEC announces preliminary candidate lists –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 August 2015 (p. 1)

³ Notification (8/2015) –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 August 2015 (p. 1)

⁴ EU, Myanmar sign agreement on deployment of EU mission to observe elections –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 August 2015 (p. 2)

⁵ Democracy cannot thrive without peace: Senior General –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 August 2015 (p. 3/)

STATE OF EMERGENCY, MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER EXTENDED IN KOKANG

The President's Office released 2 ordinances on 18 August to extend a state of emergency and a Military Administrative Order in Shan State's Kokang self-administered zone until 17 November. The region remains unable to return to normalcy in terms of administration, peace and tranquillity and rule of law, according to the ordinance. The new ordinance will last for 90 days and continues the state of emergency imposed under a prior ordinance that expired on 17 August. The initial declaration of the state of emergency was made on 17 February after the region was plunged into instability following attacks by Kokang rebels earlier that month.⁶

TATMADAW SEEKS BETTER CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: ARMED FORCES CHIEF

In a meeting with British Ambassador to Myanmar Andrew Silas Patrick on 19 August, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that the Tatmadaw is working to improve civil-military relations. During the meeting in Naypyitaw, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing emphasized the need to promote friendly relations and cooperation between the Tatmadaw and government organizations, highlighting the extensive involvement of the armed forces in flood relief operations. Ambassador Patrick acknowledged that the Tatmadaw had won praise from international organizations and armed forces for its handling of the flood response. The British ambassador also agreed that the Tatmadaw played a critical role in Myanmar's democratization process and said that he was pleased to hear the military would continue cooperation with the government, regardless of election results.⁷

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MEETS WITH THAILAND'S PM

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing held talks with Thailand's Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha on 27 August. The Myanmar leader arrived in Bangkok to participate in the 3rd Thailand-Myanmar High Level Committee Meeting. During the talks, the Commander-in-Chief expressed his willingness on behalf of the Tatmadaw (army) to cooperate with Thailand for maintaining stability in both countries. He also expressed thanks to Thai Premier General Prayut Chan-o-cha for Thailand's aid to Myanmar people in flood-hit areas and expressed sympathy for the recent deadly bomb blast in Bangkok. Thailand's prime minister expressed his hope for opening industrial zones in border towns in Myanmar, saying that Thailand is ready to operate industrial zones in its border areas with Myanmar. He also pledged to step up efforts for bilateral cooperation in regards to the registration of migrant workers from Myanmar and security in border areas. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also called on General Prem Tinsulananda, Privy Council President of Thailand, whilst in Bangkok.⁸

CANDIDATES NEED TO MEET WITH ELECTION SUB-COMMISSIONS FOR SCRUTINY PROCESS

The Union Election Commission (UEC) on 16 August informed all political parties and candidates for scrutinizing their nominations. The respective election sub-commissions will scrutinize the nominations from 18 to 27 August. Up to now, there are 1,772 candidates for Pyithu Hluttaw 913 for Amyotha Hluttaw, 3,504 for region and state Hluttaw and 163 for ethnic affairs constituencies. All

Speaker and EU Ambassador discuss general election –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 August 2015 (p. 3)

⁶ State of emergency, military administrative order extended in Kokang –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 August 2015 (p. 1)

⁷ Tatmadaw seeks better civil-military relations: armed forces chief –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 August 2015 (p. 3)

⁸ Commander-in-Chief meets with Thailand's PM –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 August 2015 (p. 3)

candidates of political parties and independent candidates need to meet with the election sub-commissions in scrutinizing the nominations not to be delay the work process.⁹

VOTERS CAN CAST BALLOTS OUTSIDE CONSTITUENCIES: UEC

The Union Election Commission (UEC) issued an announcement on 19 August, in which it stated that voters living outside their own constituencies will be able to cast ballots in the electorates where they reside. The voters need to apply for the voting rights at local election sub-commissions, the announcement said, adding that the permission applies only to voters who have been away from their own constituencies for at least 180 days. Applications should be sent no later than 10 October, the UEC said.¹⁰

NATIONWIDE ELECTORAL REGISTERS TO BE PUBLICIZED IN SEPTEMBER

The nationwide electoral registers will be released only in September, according to the Union Election Commission. The commission had initially planned to publicize the voting lists nationwide from 23 August to 6 September, but the country's devastating floods in 12 states and regions have caused the announcement of the lists to be postponed. "People across the country are engaged in the rehabilitation process, so they are unable to check whether their names are on the electorate register," UEC's director Thaug Hlaing said. The voters will have 14 days to verify their legitimacy to vote. According to the initial announcement made by UEC, there are 32 million eligible voters across the country. Candidates will start campaigning for support in their constituencies from 8 September to 6 November. The General Election 2015 has been scheduled for 8 November.¹¹

PARTY POLITICAL BROADCASTS TO BE AIRED FROM 8 SEPTEMBER

The Union Election Commission (UEC) announced on 27 August that it will allow party political broadcasts on radio and television between 8 September and 6 November. The commission demanded in its announcement that Political parties are required to submit full transcripts of broadcast materials for approval from the commission at least seven days ahead of the scheduled slots. The commission has set the maximum length of radio and television broadcasts to 15 minutes and will shortly decide on the rotation of political parties. Broadcasts may be made either in Myanmar or ethnic minority languages. The UEC will scrutinise scripts in coordination with the Ministry of Information and reserves the right to deny broadcasting rights to political parties. It will provide reasons for its refusal to do so. Broadcasts deemed to have a detrimental effect on national consolidation, security, the rule of law, the dignity of the armed forces, racial, religious or individual rights or is in violation of existing laws will not be aired.¹²

Hluttaw Sessions (Highlights)

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

19 July¹³

⁹ Candidates need to meet with election sub-commissions for scrutiny process – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 August 2015 (p. 3)

¹⁰ Voters can cast ballots outside constituencies: UEC – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 August 2015 (p. 3)

¹¹ 32 mil eligible voters. Nationwide Electoral registers to be publicized in September – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 August 2015 (p. 1)

¹² Party political broadcasts to be aired from 8 Sept – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 August 2015 (p. 3)

¹³ No plans to open currency trading centres at border area – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 August 2015 (p. 2)

- Deputy Governor Set Aung of the Myanmar Central Bank (CBM) briefed the session and stated that **there are no plans to open to foreign currency trading centres in border areas. As the government has permitted private banks and companies to open currency exchange centres across the country including border areas and there is no need to open currency trading centres in border areas**, he added.

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

19 July¹⁴

- The session discussed an emergency motion to halt the current parliamentary. **A total of 128 MPs voted for the motion and 34 against the motion.**

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

20 July¹⁵

- The session decided to suspend discussion on the recall bill, with **264 voting in favour and 235 against the bill** ;
- Defence Services representative Brig-Gen Tint Hsan called for **rapid enactment of the bill, saying the Constitution provided all citizens with the right to recall their representatives considered as dishonest**. He also stressed that legislative bodies were responsible for **protecting the fundamental rights of the citizens** ;
- MP Aung Kyi Nyunt of the Magway Region constituency suggested a **broader discussion of the differences between the Amyotha Hluttaw and the Pyithu Hluttaw in line with the remarks proposed by the Joint Bill Committee, warning that prompt approval of the bill would affect national reconciliation** ;
- MP Nay Win Tun of the Shan State constituency and MP Daw Khin San Hlaing of Pale constituency **argued in favour of further discussion**.

26 July¹⁶

- The session approved the proposals to take out **2 loans** ; the first loan amounting to **US\$ 260 million from the Asian Development Bank's ASEAN Infrastructure Fund** and second loan of **40 million Euros from the French Development Agency** ;
- The session also discussed and supported the adoption an optional protocol governing the involvement of children in armed conflicts as per the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC)**. Deputy Minister Foreign Minister Tin Oo Lwin said **159 countries have already signed up to the protocol, including 8 ASEAN members**. **"The signing of the protocol will serve as convincing evidence of Myanmar's commitment to protect the rights of its children,"** he added.

¹⁴ Amyotha Hluttaw backs motion to suspend parliament – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 August 2015 (p. 2)

¹⁵ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw suspends discussion on recall bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 August 2015 (p. 2)/ MP criticizes suspension of recall bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 August 2015 (p. 2)

¹⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) Roundup – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-27-red.pdf> (GNLM) 27 August 2015 (p. 2)

27 July¹⁷

- The Union Peace-Making Work Committee Vice Chairman Union Minister Aung Min discussed **the government's ongoing efforts to achieve a nationwide ceasefire agreement. He said that despite attempts by successive governments to end armed struggles in Myanmar since the country won its independence, the complex political roots of various conflicts has made it difficult to find a solution ;**
- **President Thein Sein had invited ethnic armed groups to take part in political dialogue with the aim of reaching a consensus for achieving peace and praised the government for reaching 39 bilateral agreements with 15 ethnic armed groups ;**
- **He went on to say that the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team of the ethnic armed groups is currently negotiating the terms of a nationwide ceasefire agreement after signing Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation ;**
- **After 17 months of negotiations, the 2 sides reached an agreement over the approved draft of the agreement but discussions stalled when ethnic groups demanded another 13 points, according to Minister Aung Min ;**
- **The government has agreed to discuss these further demands of ethnic groups with the aim of reaching a final agreement, he said.**

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ETHNIC SUMMIT REAFFIRMS CONCILIATORY ALL-INCLUSIVE SIGNING

The 4-day summit of the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) in Chiangmai ended on 23 August and the meeting reaffirmed its stand on the principle of all-inclusiveness, which means all the armed resistance movements must be allowed to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

“One of the 11 resolutions passed at the summit is that the EAOs will stand by its principle for all EAOs to sign the NCA while exploring ways and means to pragmatically implement it,” said a source who requested anonymity. The resolution appears to be a compromise between “hardliners” who won't sign unless all are allowed to sign by Naypyitaw and “softliners”, who are ready to sign for their respective organizations but will continue to negotiate to obtain guarantees for the rest that they would not be subject to military offensives by the Burma Army, according to another source coming from the meeting. Another resolution says the “Big Five” that will travel to Naypyitaw to meet the President and the Commander-in-Chief at the earliest date possible will be:

Gen N-Banla, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)	-	Vice-Chairman
Gen Mutu Saypoe, Karen National Union (KNU)	-	Chairman
Abel Tweed, Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	-	Chairman
Nai Htaw Mon, New Mon State Party (NMSP)	-	Chairman
Lt-Gen Hso Ten, Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)	-	Patron

They will be accompanied by 3 Special Delegation (SD) leaders: Naw Zipporah Sein (KNU), Dr Laja (KIO) and Pu Zin Cung (CNF). No date has been fixed yet for the meeting. In his meeting with the Interim Press Council (IPC) on 24 August, the Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, stated that the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) better known as Kokang, Arakan Army (AA), Ta-ang

¹⁷ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) Roundup –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 August 2015 (p. 2)

National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA)'s 4th Brigade (which is active in northern Shan State) must "abandon (their) arms."¹⁸

NCA SIGNING; NMSP STANDS WITH UNFC'S DECISIONS

New Mon State Party (NMSP) will act according to the decisions of the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) in endorsing the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA), welcomed by President Thein Sein. "The first point is to have all ethnic armed groups participate in the NCA signing. The second point is to stand firmly with such decisions the UNFC makes regarding the decision of all ethnic armed groups' involvement in the NCA signing. The third point is if it is not suitable to stand like that, because it can cause barriers in the peace process, we will still stand with the decisions made by the majority of the UNFC members. At the moment, it is just 3-points", said NMSP's Chairman Nai Htaw Mon.

President Thein Sein has invited 15 ethnic armed groups to sign the NCA, and those groups are the NMSP, Kachin Independent Organization (KIO), Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Chin National Front (CNF), Wa United State Army (WUSA), Restoration Council of Shan State/South Shan Army (RCSS/SSA), Shan State Progressive Party/South Shan Army (SSPP/SSA), Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army – Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Pa O National Liberation Army, and National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K). However, the government did not invite 6 armed groups, namely Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Arakan Army (AA), Wa National Organization, Lahu Democratic Union, and Arakan National Council.

The Karen National Union (KNU), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Karen Peace Council, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) announced recently that they will sign the NCA. The Civil Society Organizations Forum Negotiation Committee, comprised of 260 members, on 17 August, released an announcement, requesting the government to include all ethnic armed groups in signing the NCA.¹⁹

KAYIN CSO NETWORK SEEKS LARGER PEACE ROLE

About 15 Kayin civil society groups have called on ethnic peace negotiators to give them a larger role in the peace process. Members of the Karen Peace Support Network issued a statement urging greater inclusion of community-based and civil society groups following a meeting on the Thai-Myanmar border from 21 to 22 August. They said they were concerned at the text of the most recent draft nationwide ceasefire agreement, which was released by the government on August 18 following negotiations earlier in the month. "We have found that it contains a limited role for civil society organisations," said Ko Mahn Thein Zaw, head of the Thwee Community Development Network based in Kawkareik Township, Kayin State. He said civil society groups would like to take part in the signing of the nationwide ceasefire as witnesses or observers. "We believe this is a way of ensuring the peace process or the nationwide ceasefire agreement is sustainable," he added.

Members of the Karen Peace Support Network urged unity among armed groups considering signing the ceasefire, but did not insist that all of them be allowed to sign. Instead, they said that the signing should only take place after "military, political and social guarantees" have been reached in relation to the six groups blocked from signing. "If only some groups sign the deal, it is not a nationwide peace

¹⁸ Ethnic summit reaffirms conciliatory all-inclusive signing – <http://english.panglong.org/ethnic-summit-reaffirms-conciliatory-all-inclusive-signing/> (Shan Herald News Agency) 25 August 2015

¹⁹ NCA signing; NMSP stands with UNFC's decisions – <http://monnews.org/2015/08/25/nca-signing-nmsp-stands-with-unfcs-decisions/> (IIMNA) 25 August 2015

[agreement],” Ko Mahn Thein Zaw said. “So, we are urging the inclusion of all armed groups invited by the government to sign the nationwide ceasefire.”²⁰

RCSS VOWS NOT TO SUPPORT ANY PARTIES

The Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) representatives met with the people in more than half of the townships in Shan State told them it is not taking sides in the upcoming November polls, according to a 353 page report, a copy of which was read by to SHAN.

The 19 strong delegation, made up of 6 males and 13 females, had made a month long tour of 39 towns in 35 townships (2 of them in Mandalay Region), 21 June-22 July. “We are not siding with any parties,” said Lt-Col Sai Harn, leader of the delegation. “We will not persuade anyone to cast votes for any candidates. And we will not consider setting up any political parties until the 2008 constitution is amended.” Not a few had thought since its sister organization, the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA), is allied to the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), it was natural RCSS/SSA would be supporting either it or its rival Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP). Many had also complained why the two parties were making it hard for them to decide. Thousands last year had signed a petition urging them to merge, only to be turned down by both. “We want them to be a single party,” one of the participants was quoted as saying, “Now we don’t know which party to vote.” Others were critical of the inability of each party to bend. The main contentious point is the SNLD’s 8 states stand (1 Burman and 7 non Burman) and the SNDP’s 14 states (7 Burman and 7 non Burman) stand.

The RCSS/SSA, after trying to reconcile the two warring parties last October, gave up. “It is a matter of priorities,” Sao Yawdserk, leader of the RCSS/SSA explained. “We want them to be one party, but they can’t. On the other hand, both are willing to negotiate with Naypyitaw on a state-based platform by co-founding the Committee for Shan State Unity (CSSU). In my opinion, that should come first.” According to the said report, the people are mostly concerned with issues that directly affect their day-to-day life: drug abuse, land confiscation, children’s education, coal mining, deforestation, taxation, recruitment of new fighters, extrajudicial killings, and continued fighting despite ceasefire being signed. Other issues discussed at the public consultations include constitutional amendment, dam projects on the Salween and the Wa demand for a separate statehood, among others.²¹

NLD, 88 GENERATION ANNOUNCE ELECTION PARTNERSHIP - CANDIDATE ROW

Burma’s National League for Democracy (NLD) and the country’s popular 88 Generation activist group have announced they will collaborate to monitor the Nov. 8 election, in order to ensure accurate voter lists and prevent electoral fraud.

The joint statement, released on 24 August, follows the NLD’s rejection of most candidates submitted by the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society to contest the election under the opposition party’s banner. The groups said that their cooperation would also extend to future constitutional amendment campaigns and the building of a democratic federal union in partnership with the country’s ethnic minorities. The statement also urged eligible voters to ensure their names were included on voter lists prepared by the Union Election Commission.

The 2 groups collaborated last year on a petition drive urging the Union Parliament to reform several provisions in Burma’s 2008 Constitution, including articles that barred NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency and guaranteed a 25 percent allocation of parliamentary seats to the military.

²⁰ Kayin CSO network seeks larger peace role –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16155-kayin-cso-network-seeks-larger-peace-role.html> (Myanmar Times) 26 August 2015

²¹ RCSS vows not to support any parties –

<http://english.panglong.org/rcss-vows-not-to-support-any-parties/> (Shan Herald News Agency) 24 August 2015

The petition campaign eventually attracted over five million signatures, around 10 percent of the country's population.

Earlier this year, 17 members of the 88 Generation group submitted applications for candidacy with the NLD. Only one of the nominees was chosen, while the opposition became the target of heated criticism for excluding a number of other prominent candidates and ignoring the wishes of numerous township NLD offices. "We are choosing the most suitable MPs for the country. Everyone has the right to apply as candidates but the [central executive] committee needs to choose the best people," party spokesman Nyan Win told Reuters at the time. Ko Ko Gyi, one of the 88 Generation's leaders and one of the most prominent exclusions from the NLD's candidate list, said that he would set up his own political party to compete in future elections.²²

KAREN STATE: NLD SENIOR MEMBERS DEFECT TO JOIN NEW KAREN PARTY

Two senior members of the Karen State's National League for Democracy resigned from the party to join the newly formed Karen Party. According to a Karen state NLD official, Saw Poe Wah, vice chairman of NLD Karen State, and Saw K'lue Htaw, administrative committee member from Hpa-an district resigned and will contest as representatives of the Karen National Party (KNP) in November's general election. On 17 August, Secretary of Administrative Committee of the Karen State NLD Min Chit Tun, confirmed to that its senior members had resigned.

Sources from the KNP said that Saw Poe Wah and Saw K'lue Htaw will contest as KNP members for the State Hluttaw No 1 and No 2 constituencies in Thandaung Gyi Township, Karen State. Karen News understands that both candidates have submitted their names to the Union Election Commission. Regarding the issue, Naw Christine Tun, NLD chairman from Thandaung Gyi Township said, "We welcome our Karen democratic forces contesting in our township". Mahn Tain Win Sein, vice chairman of KNP said that all the democratic forces not only need to oppose the dictatorship but also need to understand the ethnic issues. Moreover, most ethnic parties believe that to achieve democracy, federalism is needed. Mahn Tain Win Sein said that he warmly welcome the new members for joining them after resigning from a major party. Although some members of state NLD view that resignation of senior members in state level could have caused by the difference views on candidate selection, the individuals who resigned refuse to comment on the reason for their resignation. According to members of NLD, after releasing the names of the NLD candidates for the coming general elections, there have been some conflicts within NLD and some members were terminated by NLD and others resigned from the party.²³

NLD BANS CANDIDATES FROM SPEAKING TO MEDIA

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has barred its candidates from speaking to the media or participating in public debates, the second such gag order the party has issued since gearing up for the elections. In a statement issued on the party's official website on 20 August, the party warned candidates against giving comments to print, broadcast or online journalists. While the statement did not give the duration of the ban, media reports suggested that it would remain in place until candidates are confirmed or official campaigning begins on 8 September. The NLD is the only party known to have issued such an edict. While seemingly at odds with its stated commitment to transparency and democracy, the party has often been criticised for its strict centralisation and autocratic style. "We announce that the party's candidates are barred from answering [questions

²² NLD-88 Generation Announce Election Partnership Candidate Row – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/nld-88-generation-announce-election-partnership-despite-candidate-row> (the Irrawaddy) 25 August 2015

²³ Karen State: NLD Senior Members Defect To Join New Karen Party – <http://karennews.org/2015/08/karen-state-nld-senior-members-defect-to-join-new-karen-party.html/> (Karen News) 24 August 2015

from] radio, television, print and other Medias, and from participating as an individual or a representative of the party in public speeches, debates, interviews and penal discussions,” said the statement, which was signed by the party’s central executive committee.

In July, before the candidates were selected, the party warned would-be NLD parliamentarians to stay away from social media and the press until the party announced its list. The NLD said its latest warning was issued to avoid misunderstandings while the Union Election Commission scrutinises candidates. The statement also warned NLD candidates to follow the party’s election campaign rules and code of ethics. NLD Spokesperson Nyan Win in speaking to Radio Free Asia on 21 August said that the party is concerned about candidates talking to the media before they have been confirmed as a candidate by UEC. “I have no comment for those who criticise the issue of freedom of expression,” he said. Party members said they have no intention of infringing on the ban. NLD Central Committee member and editor of the NLD D Wave magazine Aung Shin, said the publication will follow the gag order. “We have only described the speeches of party chair [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi] as she travels around the country,” he said. The blanket ban appears not to apply to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, even though she is running as a candidate for the Pyithu Hluttaw seat of Kaw-hmu in rural Yangon Region. She spoke at a public forum on 21 August that was widely covered by the media and held a press conference as recently as 18 August. The party’s current MPs, many of whom are running for re-election, also regularly talk to journalists during breaks in parliament. Nay Phone Latt, a regular contributor to an RFA program about youth and politics and also an NLD candidate, said he is sympathetic to the order, which has not affected his show. If a candidate makes an off-the-cuff remark that violates electoral law the UEC could kick them off the party’s list, and force them to be short a candidate, he said. But some suggest the gag order may be overcautious and could cost the party crucial votes. The director of DVB’s election debate program, Myo Ther Htet, said NLD candidate cannot participate in the weekly dialogues. “I don’t understand why the NLD has not allowed their candidates to talk to the media. The NLD is losing an opportunity to connect with voters,” he said.²⁴

ETHNIC PARTIES ANGERED BY NLD’S BROKEN PROMISES ON SEAT-SHARING

A leading ethnic politician has accused the National League for Democracy (NLD) of breaking its promise not to run a candidate against him. The NLD had said it would not contest seats in which members of the Committee Representing the People’s Parliament (CRPP), formed in 1998 by MPs elected in 1990, were standing for election. The NLD ignored requests for a broader alliance with ethnic minority parties, fielding candidates in 1138 of 1171 official constituencies. Most of those they have left open are in areas where voting is not expected to take place, such as territory held by the United Wa State Army. Rakhine National Party (RNP) Aye Thar Aung was one of only two CRPP members to run, and the NLD has fielded a candidate against him in an Amyotha Hluttaw seat encompassing Minbya and Myebon townships. He has accused Aung San Suu Kyi and her party of “lying” to the RNP and other ethnic political parties about their election plans. “Daw Suu shouldn’t have said anything if she wasn’t going to keep her promise. She should not give frivolous promises. If she does, the people and her allies will lose trust in the NLD,” he said. Aye Thar Aung also added, “We don’t care about the NLD’s [candidate] list. They will not win in the ethnic constituencies. I believe that the ethnic parties will win in all constituencies of every one of the seven states.”

Tun Hein, a member of the NLD central executive committee, which signed off on the party’s candidate list, declined to comment. In July, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told the media the party would consider avoiding parliamentary seats that overlap with those of its allies. In late July, the NLD and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy discussed this strategy further, with the NLD agreeing not to contest seats where CRPP members would run for election. The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a

²⁴ NLD bans candidates from speaking to media –
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16125-nld-bans-candidates-from-speaking-to-media.html>
(Myanmar Times) 24 August 2015

coalition of ethnic parties that includes the RNP and the SNLD, proposed an alliance with the NLD for the election. However, the NLD did not respond and instead registered candidates in nearly every constituency. “We never got the chance to discuss an alliance with the NLD. We heard they are facing problems related to their list of candidate and we understand that. But it has created a bad situation between the NLD and the ethnic political parties,” said Secretary of the SNLD Sai Nyunt Lwin.

Ethnic parties have been particularly angered by the NLD’s decision to contest 29 constituencies for ethnic affairs ministers. Ethnic groups with more than 52,000 members – 0.1 percent of the total national population – in a single state or region are given representation in that state or region’s government in the form of an ethnic affairs minister. The ministers are the only directly elected members of government. While most voters fill out 3 ballots – one each for the upper and lower houses of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in Naypyitaw, and one for their state or region parliament – members of an eligible ethnic group vote a fourth time, for their ethnic affairs minister, who is also an MP in the regional parliament.

Aye Thar Aung said he was confident the NLD would lose the seats because it is primarily seen as an ethnic Bamar party. “I don’t think the NLD can win the seats for ethnic affairs ministers. Ethnic people will only vote for ethnic parties – I believe that,” he said. The Committee Representing the People’s Parliament (CRPP) was formed after the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) failed to respond to calls to recognise the results of the 1990 elections. Only two members will contest the election: Aye Thar Aung and Zomi Congress for Democracy chair Pu Chin Sian Thang, who will run in Tiddim Township. The NLD has not registered a candidate to run against Pu Chin Sian Thang.²⁵

SITTING MP BLOCKED FROM RUNNING AGAIN

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has blocked a serving MP – a self-described Rohingya from Rakhine State – from standing as a candidate in the November 8 election. MP Shwe Maung’s bid to re-contest his Pyithu Hluttaw seat with the Union Solidarity and Development Party was rejected, so he decided to register instead as an independent candidate. But like the largely stateless Muslim minority group he represents, Shwe Maung is up against junta-era citizenship laws slammed by the UN for being despotic and discriminatory. The election commission office in Maungdaw sent a letter to the MP on 22 August notifying him that he is ineligible to run as his parents were not citizens when he was born, a claim he denies. A political rival from the Rakhine National Party, Aung Thaung Shwe, filed the complaint that precipitated the commission’s decision. The Maungdaw commission office confirmed the sitting MP had been disqualified based on his parents’ lack of citizenship. The decision raises questions about the vetting process in 2010, when Shwe Maung was cleared to run under the same law. Director of the Rakhine State Immigration Office, Khin Soe Rakhine State, said the election commission and the district immigration officials were cooperating to decide who should be eligible to contest the elections. “How he became an MP [in 2010] depends on the scrutiny by the previous election commission – but it is not good to talk about it,” he said. Maungdaw district immigration officer Saw Naing said he was involved in investigating Shwe Maung’s citizenship. He refused however to go into the details yesterday. Shwe Maung said the decision is incorrect as he, his parents and his grandparents are all Myanmar citizens. He plans to appeal the decision with the Rakhine State election commission in Sittwe. “The accusation is not true. Both my parents received National Registration Cards in 1957 when that was the only ID that existed,” he said. “It is very clear we’re citizens.” Shwe Maung, who was born in 1965, said his father, Abdul Hadi, was born in 1918 and served as a police officer in Rakhine State until retiring in 1978. “Most current MPs were born before 1982 [when the citizenship law came into force] so they would likely also hold the same National Registration Cards,” he said. He suspects deadly sectarian clashes between Rakhine and Rohingya that erupted across the

²⁵ Ethnic party angered by NLD’s broken promises on seat-sharing – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16015-ethnic-party-angered-by-nld-s-broken-promises-on-seat-sharing.html> (Myanmar Times) 17 August 2015

state in 2012 spurred the ruling party and commission to undermine his candidacy. According to Shwe Maung, one other Rakhine State candidate has been facing the same problem: Daw Khin Lwin, an independent candidate running for the Amyotha Hluttaw seat in Buthidaung. “The one distinct thing about us is that we are Muslims,” he said. Even if Shwe Maung successfully appeals his disqualification, his Rohingya electoral base has been stripped of their identity cards and most have been left off updated voter lists. “It is all very concerning,” he said. “I will have to take one issue at a time.”²⁶

INTHA GET A SECOND PARTY TO PUSH CAUSE

A new party for the Intha ethnic group has emerged to compete against the Inn National Development Party, which won several seats in the 2010 election. The Inn National League (INL) was formed from the Inn Literature and Culture Association and includes former members from the Inn National Development Party, including 2 State hluttaw representatives, Tun Aung Kyaw and Tin Kyi Win. Most of its members are hotel owners, tomato brokers and farmers. The party will contest 5 seats in the November 8 election, including the Pyithu Hluttaw seat of Nyaungshwe, 2 Shan State Hluttaw seats for Nyaungshwe, the local Amyotha Hluttaw seat and the Intha ethnic affairs minister post in the Shan State Hluttaw. “The new party is meant for the conservation of Inle Lake, as well as the development of livelihoods [of people relying on] the lake,” said Tin Soe, the party’s general secretary, who will run as a candidate for the Intha ethnic minister position. The Inn National League will face competition not only from the INDP but also the Federal Union Party, the NLD and the USDP. “Our ethnic group is a small group, and one party may seem the most appropriate. But after a lot of negotiation, it was decided that the new party should come out,” Tin Soe said. “I hope we can defeat [the Inn National Development Party] because the people in Inle who want changes will vote for us. We need to wait and see.”²⁷

ANALYSIS

Myanmar is now entering a critical and pivotal moment in its history, as it prepares for the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) and the holding of free and fair elections. The announcement that both the government and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) are committed to sign the NCA represents a breakthrough though much more remains to be done. What is more crucial is the manner in which the political dialogue is conducted and that it is an all-inclusive process. The signing of the NCA will serve as a foundation to promote trust and confidence building between the government and EAOs as well as other key stakeholders. More importantly for genuine peace to prevail it is crucial that short and long-term strategies are made clear defined and adopted. Such strategies should focus on ending the on-going conflicts as well as promoting the rights and development of the citizens and regions which have been affected. Myanmar’s transition to peace, democracy and development will not be easy due the deep-rooted nature of the issues and a such will require time and patience.

²⁶ Sitting MP blocked from running again – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16127-sitting-mp-blocked-from-running-again.html> (Myanmar Times) 24 August 2015

²⁷ Intha get a second party to push cause – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/16175-intha-get-a-second-party-to-push-cause.html> (Myanmar Times) 27 August 2015

APPENDICES

Appendix A :

NOTIFICATION (8/2015)

1. There have been some concerns among the public about an incident that occurred at the headquarters of the Union Solidarity and Development Party on August 13th, 2015. We note that the events that took place involved the change of leadership and reorganization that are a part of a normal course of business for a registered political party.
2. The government is making relentless efforts for relief and rehabilitation of flood-affected parts of the country. Concurrently, it is striving to achieve success with the peace process, and ensuring stability and peace throughout the country.
3. In addition to carrying out the executive functions of the country, the government is also cooperating with the legislative and judicial branches that make up the other pillars of a democratic system.
4. Preparations are now underway for holding of general elections on November 8, 2015, expected to be the most widely participated and inclusive elections since independence. The government shall ensure that the elections are free and fair by fully cooperating with the Union Election Commission, political parties, civil society and the public.
5. The government shall unconditionally accept the results of the elections and honor the wishes of the electorate in accordance with existing laws and regulations.²⁸

²⁸ Notification (8/2015) –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-08-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 August 2015 (p. 1)