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Readers' Front

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to the Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to better serve the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. And we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news.

We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,

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Ethnic Leaders Discuss Plans to Form Federal Alliance Army

By Azan, Kaowao: December 6, 2011

The decision to implement a federal army was reached during a meeting held on the Thai-Burmese border from 27–30 November.

From the meeting, the committee members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) appointed Maj Gen Bee Htoo, Commander-in-Chief of Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), to carry out the plan of the federal army while Gen Mutu Saypoe, who was

appointed in August as the commander of the federal army, resigned due to his heavy workload at his Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU).

The committee members of UNFC has written a draft of the plan how to implement the federal army, but still need to talk more with the military leaders from major six ethnic armed groups its members of UNFC while only politicians who are leaders from the ethnic armed groups have agreed to implement the dream of a federal army in the mean time according a source who participated at the meeting.

The politicians need to pass the order to the military leaders are from six major ethnic armed groups, including the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), KNU, KNPP, Chin National Front (CNF), New Mon State Party (NMSP), and the Shan State Progress Party.

The opinions and differences of the military leaders from the six major ethnic armed groups will hold a meeting in the middle of this month to discuss further about how to carry out the plan of forming a federal army.

Nai Kao Rot, the former deputy army chief of Mon National Liberation Army, the armed wing of NMSP, said, "I am very interested in this issue. I think it will not be difficult to implement the plan if they (ethnic armed groups) are eager to do it.

"They need a base for the federal army, and then they need to find out how to use one command under the control of the deferral army," he said.

To implement the plan of the federal army, the NMSP leaders believed that that it might take more time as there are diversities among the ethnic groups, leading to difficulties in initiating such a plan, such as making decisions on language, whether to have only one command at the army, and the jargon to use with the army.

A NMSP leader, who asked not to be named, said that the federal army could take the lead like the Arab Spring in Libya to Burma if there is no political change in Burma even though the international community push the Burmese government to have political change.

Ethnic leaders have been encouraged by the fact that foreign countries offered help to the rebel army in Libya. They believe this federal army could lead armed struggle in order to help peaceful civilian demonstrators in the future.

Members of the UNFC committee also analyzed the progress of recent peace talks between its individual groups and the Burmese government at the meeting.

KNU and NMSP leaders continue to doubt the sincerity of the government in the peace talks, according to a source who attended the meeting. These two groups will take more time to sign a peace agreement, while CNF leaders have the will to sign a ceasefire with the Burmese government.

The UNFC was formed in February at a meeting in northern Thailand attended by a dozen ethnic groups. These included the KIO, KNU, KNPP, Chin National Front, NMSP, Shan State Progress Party, Pa-O National Liberation Organization, Palaung State Liberation Front, Arakan National Council, Lahu Democratic Union, Wa National Organization, and Kachin National Organization.

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Mon Parliamentarian Skeptical about Pace of Change in Burma's Parliaments

By Azan, Kaowao: December 2, 2011

Even though Burma's nominally civilian government has been running the country for nearly one year now, there has been no change for the ethnic people of Burma, said Banyar Aung Moe, an elected member of Amyotha Hluttaw (National Parliament).

"They [the government] do not want to talk about the rights of ethnic people. I keep proposing it every time whenever I get the chance. But it seems they want to delay talking about it," he said.

During the first session of parliament, Banyar Aung Moe said that he proposed giving the right of teaching in ethnic languages for ethnic people. However, the proposal was rejected.

Dr. Banyar Aung Moe is from No. 7 Mon State Constituency in Ye Township, and he also raised questions about the local fishermen in Ye and Yebyu Townships in Tenasserim Division who have to deal with fishing on a manageable scale having to pay heavy duties from the first session of parliament on March 23.

He said that most fishermen been unable to earn enough for their livelihood, and have gone abroad to do other jobs. He wanted to know whether the government has a plan to regulate the situation.

The chief Minister of Mon State, Ohn Myint, was not happy about he raised question at parliament about the development of Mon State according to the source.

Nai Sunthorn, Chairman of Mon Unity League, said that Banyar Aung Moe took a more active role and exercised his duty at parliament well among the seven Mon representatives currently serving in the National and People's Parliaments.

"I kept proposing in the second session of parliament about the right of ethic people to teach in their own language. The chairman of the parliament told me to write rules of law about the ethic people.

"I have already proposed it to the chairman, but he told me that the issue will not be discussed until the third session of parliament," he said.

The force of democracy in parliament is weak as the military generals and the Union Solidarity and Development Party members hold a large majority in both parliaments.

"We have about 80 people, while they have about 600 people. It is difficult to discuss the issues that we propose while they have such a vast majority," he said.

He believed that the force of democracy at parliament will eventually become stronger in the future as Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, have decided to run in the upcoming by-elections.

While some observers have asserted that there is political change in Burma, Banyar Aung Moe said that this is just beginning of change. There are more reforms that need to happen, and he said that there should be nationwide ceasefire in the country.

"We do not know what their strategy is for ceasefire talks with the New Mon State Party. Actually, they [the Burmese government] need to bring in some representatives from the Mon party [All Mon Regions Democracy Party] in order to build more trust," he said.

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Ethnic Journalists in Burma Still Unable to Report in Their Own Languages

By Taramon, Kaowao: November 29, 2011

Ethnic Mon journalists in the southern areas of Burma still do not dare to establish a Mon

media organization in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, citing uncertainties about the current political situation.
"We have to wait and see for a few months because the constitution mentions nothing about rights for ethnic languages," said a senior Mon reporter from Mon State. "The lack of ethnic rights in the constitution is a big barrier, and we could get into trouble at any time if we set up our own media organization to report in our own language."
"We have a dream of creating a [Mon] news agency [inside Burma]. However the situation is still too unstable to implement the plan," said the source.
There are several Mon reporters who have been working secretly inside Burma since 2000. The undercover reporters collect news and images in Mon and Karen States, as well as Tennaserim Divison, and then smuggle the information to Mon media outlets outside the country, many based in Thailand.
"I know that that Mon citizens are hungry for not only daily Mon news, but also other publications in Mon language," said the senior journalist.
Ethnic Mon representatives who are members of the National Parliament recently proposed legislation to allow the teaching of Mon language in schools in Mon areas, but the proposals were rejected.
Mon journalists inside Mon State said that this indicated the conditions that would allow them to freely work for Mon language media are not yet present.
Meanwhile, exile media organizations, both Burmese and ethnic, report that they are under the pressure from NGOs, which are focusing their funding on supporting journalism inside Burma. However, exiled journalists are hesitant to return to Burma while they continue to have doubts about the Burmese government's sincerity towards democratic reforms and removing press restrictions.
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NMSP Will Discuss Peace-Talk Prior to the Party's Congress

Akar, Kaowao: November 27, 2011

The offer of peace talks from the Mon State Government will be discussed at the Central Executive Committee's meeting prior to the Party's Congress next month according to the New Mon State Party's leaders (NMSP).
"The party congress is going to start in December. So we have not decided anything yet during the meeting with the peace delegation. This will be discussed soon before the Congress", said Nai Hong Sar Born-khuing, who is the spokesperson of the NMSP.

According to the NMSP, the party will hold the 6th Congress at the second week of December in Ye-Chaung-Phyar, the head quarter of the NMSP, which over 100 representatives from three districts will join the congress and new central executive committees are to be elected and party future plans to be laid out by the Congress.

Nai Htaw Mon, the chairman of the NMSP, accepted a 2 day meeting at the headquarter of its party with the peace delegation led by Venerable Bhaddanta Ketumala, the Abbot of Kaw-palaing Village, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State on November 13 and 14.

The sources close the NMSP leaders said that at the meeting, the peace delegates presented some points including a ceased fire agreement, reopening liaison offices, a pre-notice for the

trespassing with arms out of the designated areas and cooperation with the Union Government for the region's developments.

The NMSP replied that it will stand with the UNFC (the United Nationalities Federal Council)'s principles and will not discuss this separately but will bring these offers to the central executive committee's meeting for a discussion.

"We presented our views and they stick firmly to the UNFC's principles. Of course, we didn't give them any pressure. But, you know people are dying for peace now", said a delegate, Dr. Min Kyi Win, the joint general secretary of the Mon National Democratic Front.

Dr. Min Kyi Win also pondered that there would be a possibility of dialogue and a positive change but steady and step by step if the government is accordingly convinced the NMSP's stance.

On the 6th of October, the NMSP's delegates led by Nai Tala Nyi initially met Col Htay Myint Aung, the Mon State minister for security and border affairs and the head of the Government delegates in shelter of the Light Infantry No. 61 based in Ye Township, Mon State.

Again on the November 19, The Minister of the Railroad Transportation, Aung Min, separately met with the Karen National Union, Karen National Progressive Party, and Chin National Front, which are among of the 6 principal founders of the UNFC in Mae Sai, Chiang-rai Province, a Thai-Burmese border town.

Furthermore, the chair-person of (the Civil Peace Action Committee) Thein Zaw and members held a talk with the Shan State Army-North in Nay Pyi Daw, capital of Burma, on October 29.

The UNFC principals are to initially hold talks and first reach nation-wide ceasefire agreement before sit around the table with the Government for peace talk. However, Nai Hong Sar, the General Secretary of the UNFC told Kaowao that there are still obstacles to deal with the government delegates.

"It's right we said we want to hold talk with the central government. But, they didn't say they will discuss in group. They said they prefer it separately. We are still far from reach", said Nai Hong Sar.

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Interview: Nai Hong Sar, Secretary of the New Mon State Party

Kaowao: November 26, 2011

'*She knows that if the government cannot solve the ethnic issues, there will be no peace or development in this country*'

Relating to the political changes in Burma since Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, announced the decision to re-register the party and participate in Burma's upcoming by-elections, Nai Hong Sar, Secretary of the New Mon State Party, as well as the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), spoke recently to Kaowao

about his current political views. These views are not necessarily the views of NMSP or UNFC, and are only his personal views.

Question: The National League for Democracy has decided to re-register as a legal political party, and Aung San Suu Kyi Party has decided to contest in the upcoming by-elections. Relating to these current political changes, what is your opinion?

They [the Burmese government] have implemented a little democracy since they changed from a fully military government to a partially civilian government. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party use the non-violence method. Those who use this method, they need to take the opportunities that come to them.

Their decision is very appropriate with their methods. They need to contest in the election, even if it is only a small opportunity that this government has opened a door for them. If they [the NLD] did not make this decision, their non-violent methods may not have very much effect.

They [the Burmese government] believe that if they can bring Aung San Suu Kyi onto their side, the international community is going to respect the government and will recognize them, and the sanctions from the international community that are imposed on the country may be lifted.

During this period, there will be benefits of basic democratic change in the country. If she [Aung San Suu Kyi] gets a seat in parliament, then she can discuss issues in the parliament. There will be some people who have similar ideas to her, and they will support her, and even possibly USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party] members may support her because there are some military leaders who are at parliament, but they are aware that the military system does not benefit the people. Some have in their minds that they want to have political change in the country.

[If Aung San Suu Kyi wins a parliamentary seat in the upcoming by-elections,] there will be a force to bring more democracy to the parliament with those who are neutral, and those who want to have political change in the country by supporting her.

Question: What is the benefit for the ethnic people of Burma from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to re-register her party and to participate in the future election?

I want to say that she has a good mind and is the best leader among all the Burmese leaders who understand the situation of the ethnic people. Her father, General Aung San, agreed and signed the Panglong Agreement with ethnic leaders in the past, but it failed to be implement [after his assassination]. In order to maintain her father's dignity or her father's role, she should seek to work with ethnic leaders in a similarly cooperative way.

Since the 1990 election, her party and the ethic parties have negotiated and agreed to promote and recognize ethnic rights. We held the Maethrawtha Seminar conference in 1997. We released our statement from the seminar that we had agreed to set up a federal union of Burma, and Aung San Suu Kyi supported us.

Question: You have mentioned many positive things about her. But are you not worried about her, or have a certain amount of mistrust, as she is a Burman Burmese?

If we look at all of what she has done in the past, even if it is only a little for the ethnic people of Burma, she is going to be able to do that and more at parliament.

However, for our ethnic people, we should not breathe easy or rely only on her or follow her blindly. We should also fight on our own in order to get our rights. We [ethnic people] should be united. We need to fight both legally with politics, and illegally with our armed struggles.

If we can do effectively with both methods, we will get our achievement.
We have lost one comrade now. The government knows that we have asked to have tripartite dialogue [between the government, ethnic groups, and Burmese pro-democracy groups]. They have taken one force, and only one force now remains. They are going to play one-by-one for them, until we can no longer have tripartite dialogue.
For the Burmese government, it is good for them as they can take Aung San Suu Kyi on their side. But, for us, we should not think that we have lost a lot after Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have joined the government's side because she knows that if the government cannot solve the ethnic issues, there will be no peace or development in this country. We believe that she will not forget about us.
Question: Some people have said that Aung San Suu Kyi is risking losing the support and trust of ethnic people as she re-registers her party and participates in the by-elections. What do you think?
It could be right because she has decided to participate with the government. When she opposed the government, she had a lot of trust from our ethnic people. Therefore, there should be concern about this. She should do everything she can to maintain the trust and support of the ethnic people.
Question: Of the legal fight [with politics] and the illegal fight [with armed insurrection], which one is a stronger force at this time do you think?
From the point of view of those who fight for democracy, they can say the illegal fight has become weak with this situation. For example, even Dr. Sein Win from the NCGUB [the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma], said that there will be no need to fight for democracy from outside the country, as Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD re-register their party. The forces that have been fighting for democracy [from outside of Burma] may flow back into the country, and then only the ethnic forces will remain. Our forces will be weak. But, we need to solidify our forces. There will be more people inside who have the same ideas as us. This will be a force and an opportunity for us as well.
Question: How about the armed struggle of the New Mon State Party? What is the party planning to do in the future?
We need to maintain a strong stand for our armed struggle. We do not need to change our stand. We need to maintain our unity, and should continue our armed struggle to be more effective. Aung San Suu Kyi's forces, which are the Burmese pro-democracy forces, will push from one side, and our ethnic armed struggle forces will push from another side. When these two forces are more effective, we will be able to bring the Burmese leaders to the negotiation table sooner.
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Opposing Mon Parties to Merge ahead of Elections

By Azan, Kaowao: November 25, 2011

Two Mon political parties are going to cooperate and merge into one party in order to prepare to run in elections in the future in Mon State, according to party leaders.
The two parties' leaders, who are from All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP) and Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), held one on one informal talks on Wednesday in Moulmein and agreed to join the two parties.
Nai Ngwe Thein, who is the chairman of AMDP, said that "our Mon people, including monks, wanted us to join together. They told us that those who did not agree to join, would not be allowed to enter their villages."

He said that majority of our party's members have already agreed to join. If there are people who do not agree to join, their future will be decided by a party vote. If someone loses votes, they should leave the party.
The AMDP leaders said that they are going to have a meeting next Sunday to discuss with members of the party the idea of merging with the MNDF.
The AMDP participated in the election last year, and won 16 seats in Mon State and the party supported the 2008 constitution, while the MNDF did not support the new constitution and did not participate in the election. The MNDF won 5 seats in the 1990 election in Mon State.
Dr. Min Soe Lin, who is the secretary of MNDF, said, "There should be only one party in Mon State because we do not want our Mon people to be confused when they cast their votes.
We do not want Mon opposition parties take votes from our people. If we are not united, the opposition parties can take votes from our people" he said.
Mon political leaders believe that they need to prepare for future elections after Aung San Suu Kyi and her party decided to registration their party on November 18.
The leaders said that we should be united because we can not trust Aung San Suu Kyi, who they accused of taking sides with the Burmese President Thein Sein.
"The ethnic people trusted her for a long time. But, it seems now she has betrayed them. Now we should be united. We are going to talk with the different ethnic groups about joining together," said Nai Ngwe Thein.
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After ASEAN, No Change Seen in Government's Attitude Toward Ethnic Issues

By Azan, Kaowao: November 23, 2011

Mon leaders were not pleased with the talk of Burmese President Thein Sein at the recent ASEAN Summit, particularly when he told journalists that it is difficult for the government to speak with ethnic leaders all together for peace talks while they have different needs.
"You see, after they [the Burmese government] got the seat of Chairman from ASEAN, they spoke very insensitively about ethnic issues. We do not like it. Therefore, we do not trust them very much," said Dr. Min Soe Lin, Secretary of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF).
The Mon leaders said that the Burmese government still has no change in its attitude towards the ethnic people, even though the country has seemingly made changes towards democracy.
The leaders said that the government continues to act like a military regime by launching military operations in Kachin areas and attempting to divide ethnic groups for peace talks. The leaders believe that the strategy of the government is to try and destroy the unity of the ethnic armed groups.
"From our analysis, we have found that they have not changed their attitude towards the ethnic people. They still act like the military regime because we do not see anything yet that they have done to promote our ethnic rights," said Nai Hong Sar, Secretary of the New Mon State Party.
He said that the flow of democracy changed in the country because the government wants ASEAN countries and the international community to give respect to them, and the Burmese government wants the international community to lift the sanctions imposed on the country.
The Mon leaders believe that the government has opened a small space of democracy in the country in order to attract Burma's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.
The leaders said that the Burmese regime will get respect and legitimacy from the

international community after Aung San Suu Kyi participates in the election and becomes a leader in the government.
"We have lost one comrade now, who previously supported us for tripartite dialogue. She is on their [the government's] side now. But we hope that our ethnic people will have some benefits if she has a role to play in parliament," said Nai Hong Sar.
Meanwhile, the Mon leaders believe that ethnic issues have become the second important issue, while the push to release political prisoners is the first issue that the Burmese government needs to solve sincerely if the it wants to go towards true democracy in the country.
"They need to solve the ethnic issues because the world leaders today are aware of the ethnic issues as of primary importance in Burma," said Nai Sunthorn, Chairman of Mon
Unity League based in Thailand.
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MNDF Leadership Change

By Azan, Kaowao: November 21, 2011
Nai Ngwe Thein was elected as the new chairman of the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), after the reformed leaderships held the party meeting yesterday in Moulmein, capital of Mon State according to party leaders.
Dr. Min Soe Lin, who is the secretary of MNDF, said that Nai Ngwe Thein is going to lead the role of the chairman for the party and that Nai Tun Thein has resigned.
"He is old and his health has deteriorated, he often forgets things. Therefore, we decided to change our leadership," he said. Nai Tun Thein is 95 years old and Nai Ngwe Thein is only 89 years old.
Nai Tin Aung, who was a former member of the executive committee of New Mon State Party (NMSP) was appointed as a new joint chairman of the party.
There are 5 former leaders of NMSP who have been appointed as executive committee members of MNDF including, Nai Tin Aung, Nai Lyi Tama, Nai Soe Myit, Nai Thar, and Nai Kho Seik.
A former member of NMSP said, "I feel this party has more space than AMDP (All Mon Regions Democracy Party)."
The MNDF participated in the 1990 election, winning five seats. The Burmese junta disbanded the party at that time, sentencing four elected representatives to long prison terms. They were accused of blocking the ceasefire talks between the NMSP and the Burmese military in 1998.
The MNDF will have in total 45 members of the executive and central committee. In the past, the party has not taken a leadership role as the party was disbanded and could not be active legally.
"We are not in a hurry to register our party because we do not trust the government very much. We are going to wait and see what happens in the future. We will decide whether to register the after Hillary Rodham Clinton visit in Burma," said Dr. Min Soe Lin.
The Mon may have two political parties in future elections in Mon State, but the leaders of MNDF said that they do not want to make the Mon people confused between the two parties. They intend to negotiate with the All Mon Regions Democracy Party, which ran for election last year, to have one party run for election in Mon State.
"We will form a committee after we open our party to negotiate with AMDP. If we can join

one party, needless to say we are going to have a lot of power and our people may not confuse it," he said.
About 100 Mon community leaders joint the meeting that held in Moulmein yesterday, which discussed to change new leadership and also added more members of the party in order to fulfill the strength of the party.
From the meeting, some leaders said that the National League for Democracy (NLD) made a littler early for decision to run party's registration while they viewed that the Burmese government still mention there was no conscience political prisoners in Burma and still detained the political prisoners and even there was fighting in Kachin area.
Dr. Min Kyi Win, who is the join the secretary of MNDF, said, "We have different view points from the NLD for the ethnic issues.
"From my personal view point, I viewed that the NLD do not care a lot about the ethnic issues. They run party's registration that they only care about their party's interest," he said.
"We are ethnic organization and also member of UNA (the United Nationalities Alliance). There are leaders of SNLD (the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy) like Hkun Htun Oo has not released from prison yet. We need to care about this," said Dr. Min Soe Lin.
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Three Thais Kidnapped by Armed Karen Group, Two Released

By Azan, Kaowao: November 16, 2011

Three Thai citizens were kidnapped by a small armed Karen group earlier this month in the Three Pagodas Pass area on the Thai-Burma border. Two were released yesterday, but one is still being detained by the group, according to border sources.
Residents in Three Pagodas Pass said that the Burmese Special Police went to negotiate with the armed group yesterday, believed to be members of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council who surrendered last year to Burmese authorities, following requests from the Thai authorities.
Two Thai women were released around 4 pm yesterday, according to a resident in Three Pagodas Pass, after the Thai border authorities held a meeting on the Thai side at a Thai police station with leaders of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council.
"Two Thai citizens were released after they paid 500,000 baht (16234.28 $) to the kidnappers," said a source close to the Burmese border authorities.
The source said that there was still one more Thai woman being detained along with her car. The KNU/KNLA Peace Council has asked to pay 1.5 million baht (48,702 $) for her release.
The three Thai women were detained on Burmese soil on 2 November, but the news only became known yesterday after the Thai border authorities requested the Burmese border authorities to help coordinate the release of the three women, according to sources from the border.
The Thai authorities are still investigating the case. Some residents have accused that three Thai women have links to the illegal drug trade with members of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council.
There were about ten members of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council based in Three Pagodas Pass who disarmed last year, while the other members rejected the Burmese government's order to serve in Border Guard Force. The ten members made a deal with the Burmese authorities in the town to run border trade.
The KNU/KNLA Peace Council is a splinter group of the Karen National Union that signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese regime in 2007.

The Thai government previously closed its official border crossing in Three Pagodas Pass in 2007 after the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) kidnapped two border patrol officers.
Meanwhile, the border on Thai side has reopened, but the Burmese side remains closed. Residents in Three Pagodas Pass say that they are worried they may not be able to cross the border to the Thai side if Thailand closes the border again due to this situation.
There are several different armed ethnic groups operating in Three Pagodas Pass, including DKBA and KNU/KNLA Peace Council, two groups that support the Burmese government.
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NMSP members to join MNDF

By Azan, Kaowao: November 15, 2011

Eight former executive and committee members of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) plan to join the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) in order to solidify and strengthen the party for future political activities in Mon State, according to party leaders.
Dr. Min Soe Lin, Secretary of MNDF, told Kaowao, "They are going to join our party, and we are going to hold a meeting on 20 November to discuss how to all work together.
"We believe that at this time we need to reform our party in order become stronger and be more unified," he said.
The eight former NMSP executive and central committee members include Nai Tin Aung, Nai Cham Toi, Nai Nyan Tun, and others. The eight men originally intended to join the MNDF in 2010 and participate in the elections that year, but some of them did not agree with the 2008 constitution.
MNDF leaders have consistently opposed the 2008 constitution and did not apply for party registration in 2010, which was a requirement to contest the elections in Mon State.
"We are going to discuss a little bit about the possibility of our party's registration if we have time during our meeting on 20 November," said Dr. Min Soe Lin.
The eight men resigned from the NMSP while the NMSP had a ceasefire with the Burmese government from 1995 to 2010.
The MNDF participated in the 1990 election, winning five seats. The Burmese junta disbanded the party at that time, sentencing four elected representatives to long prison terms.
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NMSP and Government Peace Mission Hold Ceasefire Talks

Akar, Kaowao: November 14, 2011

Chief Minister of Mon State Ohn Myint has sent a five-member peace mediation group to the New Mon State Party (NMSP) headquarters in Bee Ree River to negotiate peace talks, according to Mon sources.
Nyan Tun, who is a colonel and a deputy liaison officer of NMSP, told Kaowao on Sunday that the peace group of the Mon State government carried a message from the State Prime Minister Ohn Myint, and the group is now meeting with the party.

"Our party will accept the offering if the demands are consistent with our party's stance," he said.
The five members of the peace group consisted of two former central committee members of NMSP, Nai Tin Aung and Nai Soe Myint. Another two are from the Mon National Democratic Front, Nai Thet Lwin and Dr. Min Kyi Winn, as well as prominent Mon Buddhist

monk Nai Ketumalar of Kawkpalang Village of Kyaikmaraw Township.
In the early weeks of October Ohn Myint appointed Nai Tin Aung to act as a mediator in peace talks between the NMSP and the Mon State government.
On October 6, three leaders from NMSP met a delegation from the Mon State government in Ye Township, led by Col. Htay Myint Aung, the Mon State Minister, for talks related to security and border affairs. These were the first such talks since the new Burmese government was established.
Meanwhile, the Karen National Union (KNU) established an eight-member commission on November 10, 2011, to engage in talks with the Burmese government.
The NMSP and KNU are members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), formed by the five major ethnic armed groups in Burma. Earlier in the year, the secretary of UNFC, Nai Hong Sar, told Kaowao that if peace talks are held, the UNFC would lead them with the hope of obtaining more political strength than each individual ethnic minority group would in separate talks with the national government.
However, after the Burmese government announced in August that the government welcomed peace talks, the different ethnic groups seem to have planned their own individual peace talks apart from the UNFC.
Mon community leaders are now saying that if no one will honor the agreements laid out by the UNFC, then it is no longer a meaningful organization, and is therefore redundant.
Banya Ran, a Mon political analyst and a Kaowao contributor, previously wrote that the NMSP and other armed ethnic groups should not attend peace talks unless the Burmese government first ceases the military offensive in Kachin area.
Nai Sunthorn, the chairman of the Mon Unity League based in Thailand, said, "Our Mon talk a lot about fighting, but actually they do not fight or assist the Kachin. This is going to contribute to disunity among the ethnic groups."
NMSP signed a ceasefire in 1995 as the last ethnic armed group to accept such an agreement with the government. The agreement ended last year after the party refused to become a Border Guard Force under the control of the Burmese government.
Mon community leaders have different points of view towards the upcoming peace talks between the NMSP and the Mon State government.
Nai Kao Rot, former Deputy Army Chief of the armed wing of the NMSP, the Mon National Liberation Army, said, "Instead of fighting, we had better take our former stronghold bases and run our businesses again."

However, the Secretary of Mon National Democratic Front, Dr. Min Soe Lin, pointed out that ceasefires in the past decreased the number of NMSP members from 7,000 to 1,000 during the fifteen years from 1995 to 2010.
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NMSP Discusses Political Developments in Burma, Possible Ceasefire Talks

By Azan, Kaowao: November 10, 2011

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) plans to commence a meeting today at the party's headquarters in Bee Ree River, Ye Township, Mon State, to review and discuss recent developments in the political situation in Burma before the party decides about entering into new ceasefire talks with the Burmese government, according to Mon sources.
Mon sources said that the meeting will last about three days, and will include both executive

committee members and regular committee members of the NMSP.
"We heard that government officials have contacted UNFC, the United Nationalities Federal Council. This is why they [NMSP] are holding the meeting now, before the government goes to all members of the UNFC for peace talks with the government," said a Mon source who refused to be named.
Meanwhile, the NMSP is going to hold the eighth conference next month, which is normally held every three years to elect new leaders within the party, as well as to review and discuss the political role and the future working plans of the party.
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Mon Political Party Has No Plans to Re-Register Following Party Law Amendments

By Azan, Kaowao: November 7, 2011

The Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), which won five seats in Burma's 1990 election only to see the election results ignored by Burma's military regime, has announced that the party will not re-register as a legal political party even if the National League for Democracy decides to accept the government's amended Political Party Registration Laws.
Speaking to Kaowao on November 7, Dr. Min Soe Lin, a MNDF representative who won a seat in Ye Township when the party contested the 1990 election, said, "We have to discuss a lot in our party if we go for party registration because we do not see any significant differences from the original version's wording that dictates that registered parties shall 'respect and abide' by the constitution to now calling on legal parties to 'safeguard' the constitution."

"And also, our party cannot accept Article 6 of the Basic Principles of The Union's consistent objectives which calls on the Defence Services to have a national political leadership role in the State," Dr. Min Soe Lin added.

President Thein Sein signed the amendments to the Political Party Registration Laws on November 5, with many interpreting the changes as intending to encourage Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party to accept the modified political system and re-register as a legal party to contest future elections, thereby giving legitimacy to Burma's nominally civilian-led government.

"It does not mean we have to go for party re-registration if the NLD goes for it," said Dr. Min Soe Lin. "Our alliance is ethnic. Our close friendship is with the NMSP [New Mon State Party]."

The NMSP, which is a Mon armed group based in the southern part of Burma, has similar the MNDF in opposing Burma's 2008 Constitution and has refused to transform its armed forces in Border Guard Forces as demanded by the Burmese government in 2010.

"We will not abandon the NMSP as they are our primary friendship," he said.

The MNDF released a statement in March 2010 announcing that they did not accept the 2008 Constitution, saying the constitution contained several unacceptable and undemocratic conditions.

Meanwhile, MNDF leaders said that they have been disappointed with the lack of positive change in Mon communities, even though there have been many hopeful discussions in the country's parliaments.

"They are talking about many good things in the National Parliament and People's Parliament. However, we have not seen our people get any benefit from it yet," said Dr. Min Soe Lin.
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Opinion / Analysis

Can UN Envoy and Burman Leaders Change The Country?

Taing Taw, November 7, 2011

As world bodies today warmly welcomed democratic reform in Burma, elsewhere in the country Burma's diverse ethnic leaders busy themselves with worrying developments in the ongoing civil war. While democratic reform occurs in stages, ethnic civil war rages. It seems the newly undemocratically elected government holds cold water in the right hand of change while the left hand holds a fire burning strongly with crackdowns on ethnic armed groups in the countryside.

Ethnic political leaders strongly criticize the Vijay Nambiar of UN special envoy in dealing with the political affairs in Burma in recent day of his trip to the country. This is one of the first times ethnic leaders have criticized the UN envoy. The ethnic people have yet to breathe democratic change, instead facing ongoing violations of human rights and discrimination. Ethnic leaders see the government's recent use of chemical warfare as a backward step on the road to national reconciliation. Burma cannot continue to move forward without tripartite dialogue between majority Burman and multiethnic groups.

Is there a genuine change in Burma today? On a small scale, there may be minor change but nothing close to national reconciliation. National reconciliation, in the eyes of Burma's ethnic groups, is more important than democratic reform. Burma's problem is not only the struggle for democracy, but the 'problem' of the ethnic nationalities.

The government recently declined an offer from the ethnic armed coalition, the United Nationalities Federal Council, to enter discussions on ethnic rights and current civil war issues, instead referring those items to the state government. The government seems to believe that ethnic problems can be addresses at the state level, but not at the national level.

Perhaps Burma today is heading toward democratic change with a good speed, in which both parties of the new government and opposition are united in their positive view of saving our nation from poverty. However, ethnic politics seem left behind, so true progress cannot proceed to the tripartite dialogue.

The world community didn't want ethnic groups to be left behind and created an approach of the tri-partite dialogue to include in the process of changing nation to not only democratic reform but ethnic rights of power sharing.

The skepticism leveled the new government by ethnic armed leaders is currently increasing after witnessing the severe offensive taken by government forces in the ethnic areas. Ethnic leaders have no more time to think about political change and see the current change as disingenuous. At any moment civil war can drag the country into turmoil, with the army seizing power as they have done in the past.

Ethnic groups have been holding their own state constitutions with a dream of forming a federation in the near future. This dream is the total opposite of the current constitution which does not guarantee any ethnic rights nor political power sharing. It is hard to have a meaningful dialogue regarding national reconciliation by adopting the current national constitution which is plainly viewed by ethnic leaders as a one-sided document. The ultimate goal of ethnic leaders to form a genuine federation base at the state level is under the attack of the 2008 new constitution from the Burmese government.
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Kaowao Newsgroup is committed to social justice, peace, and democracy in Burma. We hope to be able to provide an in-depth analysis that will help to promote lasting change and peace within Burma. Editors, reporters, writers, and overseas volunteers are dedicated members of the Mon activist community based in Thailand.
Our motto is "working together for change and lasting peace."