

NewsDesk

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'Roadmap' fever

"Roadmap" fever is picking up in Burma. Since Gen Khin Nyunt, chief of Burma's Defense Services Intelligence in his new capacity as prime minister unveiled, what is described by the state-run media in Rangoon as "seven-point policies and programs of the State", mass rallies are being held in different cities all over the country to support his roadmap.

The state-sponsored media said the mass rallies were organized by the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), an association led and financed by the generals and responsible for the deaths of many supporters and members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) when they were brutally attacked near Tabayin on 30 May.

Major Problems

Despite the claim that people are voicing support for the roadmap, no known politician, political leader, or political organization has expressed support for it in its entirety. This is because there are major problems associated with the SPDC's National Convention. The most glaring problems are the SPDC-prescribed "principles" that guide the constitution-drafting process at the national convention. The "principles" of the draft constitution already prepared by the military provide unlimited power to the "Commander in Chief" of the Defense Services who is not subject to the constitution, has the power to appoint 25 percent of all members of the "Union, State, and Regional Assemblies" as well as the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs.

According to the "principles" the President "must have military experience" and not have "parents, spouse, or children who are foreign nationals", and he can appoint military personnel as ministers, as well as the Chief Ministers, judges of the Supreme Court, etc, without being obliged to comply with the rulings of the Supreme Court. The President also delegates all administrative and legislative functions of the state to organs of the Union but their functions are not derived from the constitution.

In addition, the SPDC's draft constitution provides no general safeguards for the people, no human rights protections, and no guarantees for free speech or freedom of media and association, and so forth.

For these reasons, many political leaders and parties and ethnic nationality forces have rejected the National Convention in its current form. Since Gen Khin Nyunt announced his roadmap on 30 August major political institutions and leaders have suggested that changes were needed to make the convention more democratic and representative. Some of these comments are discussed below.

The CRPP

The Committee Representing People's Parliament, formed by political parties and representatives elected in the 1990 elections to act on their behalf before the Parliament can be convened, said in

a statement, "... prior to the commencement of the convention, the rules of procedure set down violated democratic principles and were made without consultation or agreement. Every rule was autocratically prescribed. The Convention committee arrived at decisions completely ignoring suggestions of the delegates. Consequently, the delegates and representatives of the political parties attending the convention found it impossible to participate and some walked out at a very early stage. Eventually, the National League for Democracy (NLD) delegates asked for procedural changes and decided to stay away from the convention in the meantime. This absence was used against the NLD and its delegates were expelled by the Convention Commission. From then on, there was no progress and the Convention ceased to function."

The SNLD

Similarly, in an interview with Democratic Voice Burma, U Khun Tun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), the party that won the second highest number of seats in the 1990 elections, said: "It is not a question of whether the SNLD will re-attend the National Convention... We will be able to say whether we could attend the reconvened National Convention only after examining the method of reconvening it. It is important to examine whether it is in accordance with democratic practices...whether the ethnic nationals could represent their people freely and the like. What I mean is – if all the people including Daw [Aung San] Suu [Kyi] and all political prisoners are freed and if the NLD is allowed to attend the convention, the National Convention would be convenient for all parties." When asked by DVB if things didn't turn out as expected, U Khun Tun Oo said, "What choice have we got? I have already told you our proposals. Why should we waste our time by attending the convention? All we have to do is not to attend the convention."

The UNA

The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) made up of eight ethnic nationality political parties -- Zomi National Congress, Chin National League for Democracy, the Mon National Democratic Front, the Arakan League for Democracy, the Karen National Congress for Democracy, the Kachin State National Congress for Democracy, and the Kayah State all Nationalities League for Democracy [with seven of them winning seats in the 1990 elections] -- has also rejected the SPDC's National Convention.

UNA Spokesman U Cin Shin Thang, recounting his meeting with the UN Special Envoy said that he had told Mr Razali that "if a National Convention beneficial to the country is really to be convened then first and foremost it is important that the NLD, the ethnic groups, and the SPDC should hold free and fair talks prior to convening the National Convention. Next, the National Convention Convening Commission should be formed with members mutually agreed to by all parties at the talks. Then, if the National Convention is to be convened a definite start and end date should be stipulated. Furthermore, during that time, a transitional government or a similar form of government should see to the administration of the nation. If the National Convention is convened after all these matters have been accomplished, then it could be considered fair and in accord with the desire of the people and we would accept it. Otherwise, if the SPDC is trying to revive the old National Convention, which is not in accord with the wishes of the people, then the people would not accept and it would not work."

The UNLD

U Htaung Kho Htan, elected representative of Sagaing Division's Tamu Township Constituency, and a leader of the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD) -- an alliance of 26 ethnic nationality parties and two independent elected representatives, which has now been banned by the SPDC -- told Radio Free Asia that a meeting of the UNLD held on 6 September made a five-point decision: (1) The UNLD will not accept the roadmap of the SPDC, (2) It wants immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners arrested between 1988 and now, (3) It believes that without talks taking place between the SPDC and the NLD, the political process in Burma will not advance any further, (4) All political parties should be allowed to be politically active in accordance with democratic practices, and (5) It wants an impartial inquiry to investigate the Tabayin incident since it happened in a peaceful and tranquil nation where rule of law prevails.

The NUP

The National Unity Party (NUP), formerly the Burma Socialist Program Party, was the favorite of the military in the 1990 elections but has since lost the favor of the generals. The party, which is still led by former military officials, won 10 seats in the elections. Even the NUP has avoided expressing support for the SPDC's roadmap. In a statement released recently on the 15th founding anniversary of the party, the NUP avoided mentioning the National Convention, and said the party "profoundly believes that advancement along the correct path toward the envisaged goal can be achieved only if the process of democratic transition is implemented systematically with a focus and belief that all existing confrontations must be avoided and all internal problems resolved through negotiation between the parties in the country."

The Cease-Fire Groups

At a "tripartite" meeting held in Panghsang, 13-15 October, three armed ethnic nationality forces -- the **Mong La, Shan, and Wa groups** -- which have concluded cease-fire agreement with the SPDC, agreed on a five-point position as a prerequisite for the National Convention. According to their joint statement, the three armed ethnic forces wanted: "(1) Freedom of meeting among leaders of ethnic nationalities prior to the convening of the National Convention, (2) Delegates to the National Convention to be chosen freely by each nationality concerned, (3) The National Convention must be all inclusive and participated in by **'proper'** delegates, (4) Freedom of discussion and freedom of activities during the National Convention, and (5) To lay down democratic principles in order to establish a modern and developed new democratic state. The National Convention being deemed as central to the resolution of our internal problems, we have agreed to send delegates to attend it if we are invited under the principles of Adherence to democratic norms, Equality and Coordination."

Nai Banya Mon of the **New Mon State Party**, in an interview with the Democratic Voice of Burma, said, "It would be very difficult for our party to accept the invitation to attend the National Convention if it is similar to the previous one. The delegates should be genuinely chosen, they should be freely selected by their own group, and they should have the right to discuss freely at the National Convention. Then only will a reasonable outcome emerge for our country to solve all its prevailing problems. We have discovered that the roadmap of new Prime Minister Gen Khin Nyunt has provided no definite details. In regard to this condition, our delegates were not included in the previous National Convention and the

current roadmap has no definite provisions. That being the case, we would like to say that our party is adopting a wait-and-see attitude regarding the new National Convention."

The **Kachin Independence Organization**, according to a DVB report of 12 September, has urged the SPDC to change the way delegates are selected to the National Convention. KIO Central Committee Member James said, "Let's say that we will be discussing at the National Convention. We, that is the KIO, represent an organization that has secured peace. But, it will not be purposeful if the KIO and the SPDC are the only two organizations that discuss the future of Burma. If political party representatives of the people and ethnic representatives who represent the ethnic people and the ethnic revolutionary forces show broadmindedness and understanding to each other, progress can be made in, for instance, the holding of a National Convention, drafting of a constitution, and gradually holding of elections. We believe that taking everybody's vision into account and making everybody contribute to the collective efforts are practical and hence we wrote that letter."

Views of Others

The Australian Federal Parliament Joint Standing Committee

The way SPDC had conducted the National Convention had long been criticized by the international community. The Australian Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade's inquiry into Human Rights and Progress Towards Democracy in Burma found that the Convention was not representative nor a forum for free discussion and further that the claims of the work of the Convention outlined by the junta had failed the test of scrutiny.

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights

Judge Rajsoomer Lallah, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, in his report of October 1996 said, "In November 1995, the NLD withdrew from the convention in protest at the lack of democratic rights within the forum, removing any semblance of legitimacy the National Convention might have had. Since March 1996 there have been no further meetings of the convention. There are no other signs that the SLORC intends to honor its original pledge and its international obligations (in particular, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) by transferring power to those duly elected in 1990."

Inter-Parliamentary Union

The Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva held its 173rd session on 3 October and unanimously adopted a resolution. The resolution in part says that the council, "Expresses serious doubts about the recently presented 'road map', step one of which suggests that the National Convention to be reconvened; reaffirms its conviction that the National Convention is designed to prolong and legitimize military rule against the will of the people, as expressed in the 1990 elections, and thus stands in direct opposition to the principle enshrined the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the 'will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government'."

A Distant Dream

In sum, the SPDC's National Convention hopes to perpetuate the current leading role of the military in national politics while at the same time ensuring political opposition and dissidents remain under tight control. Hence, it is not surprising to see political leaders rejecting the SPDC initiative. No self-respecting legitimate political party in Burma is expected to declare its support for the SPDC roadmap either. The hope of gaining political legitimacy through the National Convention will continue to be a distant dream for the generals as long as they refuse to compromise.

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