

Democratic Transition and Emerging Political Dynamics in Myanmar

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Abstract:

The democratic regime in Myanmar faces a plethora of challenges both in the domestic as well as external affairs. In the internal sphere, building up democratic institutions, reforms in the armed forces and national reconciliation requires intervention. On the external front, end of international isolation for economic growth and development involves its engagement with outside world. Under this background, the Paper argues for understanding the dynamics of political change and regime transition in Myanmar. It focusses on the reform agenda and prospects for political change and transformation in Myanmar.

Key words:

Myanmar, Democratic Transition, Ethnic reconciliation, Military, Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD

I. INTRODUCTION

The democratic regime in Myanmar is taking its baby-steps and growing from infancy to adolescence. In this stage, it must face a number of teething troubles. It is hoped that as it moves forward in its growth and maturity, these problems would be overpowered by the emergence of a more open and matured democracy in future. After five decades of authoritarian rule in Myanmar, the country faces a plethora of challenges both in the domestic as well as external affairs. On the one hand, the need for building up democratic institutions and re-energizing faith in Parliamentary procedures, multi-party system, reforms in the armed forces and national reconciliation demands attention. On the other hand, the international isolation of this 'hermit kingdom' needs to end to the outside world and move forward on the path of economic growth and development¹. Under this background, the Paper focuses on the dynamics of political change and regime transition in Myanmar. It argues that key to new reforms agenda raises prospects for political change and transformation in Myanmar. The changing power relations with the entry of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in mainstream politics and the future roadmap to democratic consolidation and its deepening is the main highlight of the Paper.

Political Transition and Change in Myanmar

Almost from the day Burmese regained their independence from British rule in 1948, it has remained, until recently, isolated in a region of dynamic change. In 1988 a popular uprising occurred, which seemed likely to topple the Ne Win's regime. Ne Win in fact resigned from the presidency (though initially remaining as Burmese Socialist Programme Party leader) and some liberalisation followed. Although, Ne Win stepped down, the army in Myanmar held firm and the country briefly had a civilian head of state, when the government promised multiparty elections and other reforms the military staged another coup. Since then, Myanmar was ruled directly by the military through a State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)². The people were sorely tested in 1988 when they demonstrated for freedom and change but the army ruthlessly suppressed their peaceful revolution. And even though they complied with martial law, and participated in the election of May 1990 to vote for members of a National Assembly as a first step toward the restoration of democracy, their patience went unrewarded as the military found one excuse after another to delay change. All real hopes for peaceful change were dashed when military government refused to hand over power to the democratic forces.

In November 1997, Burma's ruling military junta announced it was changing its name from the SLORC to the "State Peace and Development Council"³. The change was meant to project a softer image, because the regime had been ridiculed for years for calling itself by such a hard-sounding name (Fink 2001: 94). The 1997

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² SLORC was formed when the Burmese armed forces, commanded by General Saw Maung seized power on 18 September 1988 crushing the 'Four Eights' (8888) uprising.

³ "The change indicates that the military government regards itself as a transitional or caretaker government exacting a step-by-step transformation to a democracy it cherishes." (Mathews 1999: 80).

re-organized polity under the SPDC showed every indication of sustaining the myth of invincibility that has accompanied the regime from its birth in 1962².

As a part of the attempt by the military regime to establish 'disciplined democracy' in Myanmar, SPDC announced the 'Seven-step Roadmap' in 2002 and as per this roadmap a new Constitution was drafted by the National Convention⁴. In spite of the devastating cyclone Nargis in 2008, the SPDC proceeded with a referendum on a new Constitution in May 2008, which it claimed was approved by overwhelming majority of votes. The elections in 2010 were also the culmination of the junta's seven-step roadmap towards disciplined democracy. Less than a week after the elections, Myanmar's democracy icon and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from house arrest. Now, she has won a place in the lower house of the Parliament when the NLD won 43 of 45 available seats in a historic April 1, 2012 by-election, thrashing President Thein Sein's ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the dominant force in the legislature.

The new national and regional parliaments are the centerpiece of the country's claimed return to civilian rule. Still, the new Constitution greatly inhibits the creation of a genuine civilian government in Myanmar. One reason is the reservation of 25 per cent of all seats in the national Parliament for military personnel³. It also assigns key ministerial portfolios such as Defense and Home Affairs exclusively to military representatives. Likewise, the Constitution grants extraordinary powers to an unelected "Commander in Chief of the Defense Services," who during a self-declared state of emergency may assume all legislative, executive, and judicial authority. Finally, constitutional amendments require the approval of over 75 per cent of parliamentary members, effectively giving the military a veto over constitutional change.

Although, the change is coming slowly to the isolated country, but still, it has a long way to go. Despite, the obvious limitations of the parliamentary process, the members are hopeful that the government would sometime listen. It would prepare a ground for the next general elections in 2015. Most of the opposition parties, though they were against military engineered elections, but still they participated in it, thinking that it is only through engagement and reconciliation with the junta that they would be able to move towards greater freedom and openness and democratic reforms.

Demilitarising Politics

Demilitarising politics and sending military 'back to the barracks' is the foremost challenge for the new Government which requires consistent effort and perseverance. Notwithstanding the reform initiatives, the army still wields enormous influence over Myanmar's institutions. The Ministry of Defence, Home and Border Affairs remain under armed forces (Article 232 (b) (ii) of the 2008 Constitution). Furthermore, Article 201 related to the formation of a National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) and its role in Emergency is a sign of military being sacrosanct. Failure of the democratic forces to bring about constitutional reforms and the amendment of the controversial article 59(f) of the Constitution has ruled out all the possibilities of Aung San Suu Kyi becoming the President, though being the leader of the largest ruling party in the Parliament. Also, Article 60 provides for the procedure of electing the President who is chosen from the candidates put forward by each of the two Houses of Parliament, in addition to a third nominee from the military. The winning candidate becomes the President while the succeeding two serve as first and second Vice-President respectively. In addition, there is the most infamous article 74 laying down the procedure for formation of the Union Parliament according to which one-third of the seats would be reserved for the Defence Forces in both the Houses and article 161 extends this modus operandi to the Regional Parliaments. Last but not the least, the constitutional amendment procedure for some of the controversial provisions as mentioned under article 436 which lays down that amendment could be brought about only with the prior approval of more than seventy-five percent of all the representatives of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, after which in a nation-wide referendum only with the votes of more

⁴ The seven steps of the political reforms are –

- (1) Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996.
- (2) After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system.
- (3) Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention.
- (4) Adoption of the constitution through national referendum.
- (5) Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws (Legislative bodies) according to the new constitution.
- (6) Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution.
- (7) Building a modern, developed and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw; and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

than half of those who are eligible to vote⁴. In this background, Myanmar's experience reflects its fragile experiment with democracy which still depends upon the relics of the previous regime.

Depoliticising Military

Reform of the armed forces remains a pre-requisite for a genuine democratic transition and reconciliation in Myanmar. The entry of the military in the politics of the country in the initial decades after independence and its control over the economy and forces of production solidified its role over the years. Its consolidation overtime made it synonymous with the state apparatus and it became almost impossible to separate the two in the development process of the country. "Building a professional military under civilian control that stays out of politics and respects international norms is crucial for Myanmar's democratisation. Improvement along these lines would also be invaluable for the peace process and ultimately for reform of the military-drafted constitution"⁵. Therefore, Myanmar needs to push through a successful democratic transition through engagement with the military Generals who played a significant role in drafting the new Constitution. A significant model that Generals in Myanmar have been following is the Indonesian military—design and strategies, during the autocratic rule of Suharto⁶. Similar to Myanmar today, Indonesia also had seats reserved for the armed forces in the Parliament which was gradually phased off by the Constitutional reform process initiated since 1999-2004 in a gradual manner. Therefore, it is believed that in its transition to democracy, Myanmar could still follow the Indonesian model and focus on 'demilitarising' politics. A leading Indonesian Lt. General Agus Widjojo shared the Indonesian experience of reforming the armed forces at Naypyitaw in August 2017⁷. These could be important lessons from mutual experiences in transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

One of the centres of continuing tension within the military leadership remained the issue of transferring power to the next generation of Officers. With the top Generals advancing in age and declining in health, the prospect of a generational transition in the military leadership could not be avoided in future, thus increasing the stakes of the current state of play in the internal competition. The new generation in the armed forces possessed 'new ideas' about politics and ways of protecting their political interests as opposed to their predecessors. "Younger soldiers witnessed the state's peace-making efforts with ethnic groups and served through the transition toward democracy. Some were sent to participate in military exercises overseas, thus absorbing new ideas about the corporate culture and professionalism of the military seen elsewhere. This generational shift within the *Tatmadaw* allowed a new perspective on the role of the military in politics to take root."⁸ Even in the period post-2015 elections, we see a significant change in the attitude of the Generals. "With the easing of repression, the broadening of political freedoms, and the growing exposure to the outside world, the leading faction within the ruling party and the military did not see any choice but to accept electoral defeat"⁹. For them, "any move to steal the election would have further undermined the already tarnished reputation of the army. By accepting the results and for having engineered a peaceful transition that put the opposition in power, the military greatly improved its credibility and protected its influence"¹⁰.

Although, comments by Aung San Suu Kyi regarding "unelected representatives" as an example of an undemocratic component of the constitution distressed the military representatives in the Parliament, nevertheless, the Union Parliament unanimously approved a proposal on March 20, 2013, allowing for the formation of a committee to review the military-backed 2008 constitution. She is barred from the presidency under the 2008 Constitution because her husband, who died in 1999, was of foreign origin. The military controls one-quarter of the seats in Parliament, enough to block the amendment of the Constitution. Hence, any effort to amend the Constitution cannot disregard the role and support of the military officers in the Parliament and the political role of the army in the politics of the country. The objective sought, therefore, is a military in Myanmar that "respects human rights, follows the rule of law and operates under civilian control"¹¹. This would result in greater accountability, transparency and responsive government. Although, there is domestic support for the reform and professionalisation of the military, the only way it could be brought about are internal reforms and restructuring and building a democratic culture eventually leading to 'de-politisation of military' and 'demilitarising politics' in the internal political dynamics of Myanmar.

Democratising the NLD

The quasi-civilian regime in Myanmar allowed NLD under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi to participate in the April 2012 by-elections and re-join mainstream politics. Aung San Suu Kyi had promised during her by-election campaign to push for amendments to the Constitution, including the article that allows the military to appoint 25 percent of the members in the two houses of Parliament – including the Regional Assemblies¹². NLD had a landslide victory in the 2012 by-elections. This also influenced the power dynamics in Myanmar. According to Tin Maung Maung Than, "since the NLD has entered the Union Assembly it must

quickly transform into ‘player’ mode away from the ‘dissident critic’ mode¹³.” The success of NLD in the by-elections was a clear indicator that the NLD will be able to challenge the ruling USDP in the 2015 elections. This gave both the NLD and ethnic parties a chance to contest freely and carry out their campaign pledges in a more tactful manner.

Initially party’s newly elected members after the by-elections in April 2012 were refusing to take the swearing-in an oath that requires them to safeguard the Constitution promulgated in 2010, under the *junta*. They had appealed to the authorities to change the wording of the swearing-in oath from “safeguard” to “respect” the Constitution. However, these initial teething troubles eased out successfully, working together towards a common goal in balancing the NLD’s aspirations with the practical aspects of governing and providing a stable political environment for pursuing economic developments in Myanmar. But, the ongoing transition in Myanmar has brought about a challenge of leadership and power struggle in one of its most liberal democratic party—the NLD. Given the ongoing tussle emerging within the NLD, the political scenario at present seems to be in a pandemonium.

The NLD suffers from lack of professionalism, centralised structure and leadership vacuum. One of the most challenging exercises at this point is to revitalise the party and introduce inner-party democracy which has so long been dominated by the 88 generation and aging political leaders. As the leader of the party, Aung San Suu Kyi has to reinvigorate faith in the party which suffers from internal splits and schisms due to the ongoing cleavage between the radical and the reformist forces within the NLD. “The party now plans to implement structural reforms ahead of the 2020 elections, which are expected to be the most fiercely contested in the nation’s history”¹⁴. According to Irrawaddy (2018) “it plans to restructure and reinforce its main institutions—the central, disciplinary and working committees—at all levels”. The NLD charged with democratic centralism has accounted for a strong sense of discontentment amongst its members during the pre-election phase on the issue of selection of candidates and distribution of party tickets. This has further deepened in the post-election period on the question of allocation of ministerial portfolios. “Problems have also arisen with party members at the state and division levels, including nepotism, failing to implement orders from headquarters and disputes between cabinet members, lawmakers and the party leadership”¹⁵.

Subsequent to the rejection of the constitutional amendment procedure by the legislators, all hopes of Aung San Suu Kyi running for the post of Presidency had been dashed off. Therefore, she opted for the path of ‘cautious optimism’ supporting the reform process at an incremental level for political restructuring and institution building in Myanmar. In the nascent democratic moment, she needs to be calculative and cautious when she also faces growing international condemnation for her silence on the cause of Rohingyas—especially, their recognition and citizenship rights.

Decentralisation and Federal Reforms

Political economy of resource sharing, management and devolution of power has always been a contentious issue—even in functioning federal systems and matured democracies. It continues to be an issue in India even after 7 decades of independence. For Myanmar, it is a litmus test for the ongoing process of democratisation in the country. A greater desire for political autonomy and larger share in natural resources and failure of the political authority in meeting these demands lies at the root cause behind the historic ethnic conflict in Myanmar.

The issue of national reconciliation and peace process in Myanmar is largely determined by the dynamics of decentralisation and its political, administrative and fiscal dimensions. In Myanmar, the resource sharing arrangements—from the central government to States and Regions, is possible within the confines of the 2008 Constitution. As a matter of fact, in other federal countries, resource sharing and revenue arrangements are based upon laws and policies rather than provisions within the Constitution. In spite of the Constitutional provisions related with decentralization, several asymmetries exist at all levels – political, administrative and fiscal.

The 3rd edition of the 21st Century Panglong Conference held in July 2018 also calls for rights for regional or state governments to draw up and implement economic development policy and projects of their own. However, the executive at state and region level is still dominated by a top-down appointment process with 25% of the seats still reserved for the armed forces, and ministers have little control over the administrative apparatus, limiting the effectiveness of the new governments. State and region budgets are minuscule, and prepared in a way that reinforces central influence. Asymmetric ownership and management of natural resources and its distribution have created tensions—both at the vertical and horizontal level of administration in Myanmar.

Further reforms are needed to align the new political structures with administrative and fiscal arrangements, broaden the scope of decentralisation to more significant areas, and link it with wider democratisation, peace and administrative reform processes. In this regard, the July 2015 Amendment to Schedule - V adding additional items for tax collections by States/Regions has been a welcome move which has

widened the sources of revenue to more items. Deepening decentralisation would reduce asymmetries and development disparities in Myanmar. Negotiations and political settlements are the building blocks of federalism in Myanmar.

Dynamics of Centre-Periphery Contestations

Resolving the ethnic issue is the Myanmar's biggest challenge. An overwhelmingly Burman dominant Centre, resisting power sharing arrangements with the ethnic nationalities at the peripheries, remains the greatest dilemma in Myanmar. The fundamental divide is between the Burmans and the "nationalities" — Kachin, Chin, Shan, Rakhine, Karen, Mon, Kayah and other ethnic groups. While the Constitution of 2008 makes way for regional assemblies, but ethnic leaders have emphasised that these were "powerless" bodies. The situation is thus, very far from the federal autonomy or self-governance as demanded by the ethnic nationalities. In addition, the overwhelming role of the military, in the legislature may help in promoting their own interest, rather than the local population.

Overcoming of seventy years old ethnic conflict will not be easy and the government will have to do a great deal to build the trust necessary to move beyond temporary ceasefires to resolve the underlying political issues¹⁶. To fulfill their agenda, some ethnic groups like the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), the Chin National Party (CNP) and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) have decided to take the parliamentary route. Others like the Karen National Union (KNU), engaged in the world's longest-running war with the Myanmar regime, have decided to finally enter ceasefire agreements and initiate talks as a result of the government's peace initiative. But there are still others still waging an armed rebellion — particularly the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) fighting in the northeastern Kachin State. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of people. Thus, peace and reconciliation with the ethnic nationalities is an important necessity for rebuilding the economy. These developments, therefore, have a significant implication for the power struggle dynamics and future roadmap to democracy in Myanmar in 2020.

The issue of armed conflict and national reconciliation process has, nevertheless, been a high priority of the government, which has signed preliminary peace deals with rebel armies as part of its three-stage process towards peace. The re-emergence of the National League for Democracy into Myanmar's political arena has opened the way for tri-partite dialogue and a genuine reconciliation process between the Military, the NLD, and ethnic parties that may finally lead to a lasting sustainable peace and an end to human rights violations.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been outright in her support for peace with the ethnic nationalities. She underlines the need to develop the trust and confidence, which is lacking at present towards them. Ethnic-based political parties, perhaps, may play a greater role in this regard. They require a government, which can understand their aspirations and fulfil their desires. The 2008 Constitution falls short of satisfying the desire of the ethnic nationalities in Myanmar. The reform process, therefore, requires being inclusive for the establishment of a federal democratic polity in Myanmar. Unless the wielders of powers (military) recognises the need of ethnic national unity and accepts the principles of federalism, the trust deficit would not be bridged. According to Suu Kyi, "federalism does not mean cessation," it is a means of ethnic reconciliation and integration of the minorities on a country-wide scale¹⁷.

In view of the growing centre-periphery contestations, the issue of ethnic reconciliation demands high priority by the government, which has signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as a part of the three-stage process towards peace and ethnic reconciliation. Though the Government had signed bilateral ceasefire agreements with 15 armed groups, only 10 out of these are party to the NCA. However, some of the volatile groups such as the Kachin Independence Army, the United Wa State Army and the abrogation of the ceasefire agreement by the Kokang ethnic armed group have challenged the reconciliation process and hope for durable peace in Myanmar. Critics are apprehensive about the peace deal because of the ongoing skirmishes with some of the major armed groups and the deep-seated mistrust that some of these ethnic groups share towards the military. Nevertheless, resolving the ethnic issue will be Myanmar's biggest challenge now and last but not the least, 'post-conflict reconstruction' and 'peace-building' remains crucial for post-conflict security and stability in Myanmar.

In its reconciliation efforts, the NLD had been advocating for an 'all-inclusive' peace process even before 2015 Elections. After coming to power in March 2016, it has been a critical issue for the President U Htin Kyaw. In this regard, the initiation of the 21st century Panglong Conferences in August 2016 and May 2017 has been significant breakthroughs. It has been a landmark achievement on the path towards "peace, national reconciliation and the emergence of a democratic federal union"¹⁸. Though appreciated for its broad agenda, the First Conference held in August 2016 however, was criticised for not being inclusive. The Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) who were non-signatories to Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) were not invited. Even United Wa State Army (UWSA) walked out of the Conference on the second day citing 'inequality' and 'discrimination' after being identified as 'observers' rather than 'participants'¹⁹. The Second Conference held in May 2017 has markedly progressed in terms of its 'inclusiveness'. The seven ethnic groups

who did not attend the first conference were all present at the second one. The effort, hence, is noteworthy “toward materialising the inclusiveness of Myanmar’s peace process”²⁰.

The 3rd edition of the 21st Century Panglong Conference was held in July 2018 after being postponed four times. It ended with 14 principles agreed upon, as part 2 of the Union Accord, by the government and the 10-armed ethnic groups that have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). In the meantime, there are other pressing issues to be resolved. Negotiations aimed at persuading the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) to sign the NCA have yet to succeed²¹. The FPNCC has so far declined to join the peace process based on the NCA. Meanwhile, the military insists that signing the NCA is the only way to have a dialogue. The FPNCC members, who attended the conference as observers, held talks with Tatmadaw leaders on the sidelines of the event. Recently in the first week of September 2019, the representatives from the Government’s National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC), *Tatmadaw* and 10 EAOs which signed the NCA have agreed to hold the Fourth 21st Century Panglong Conference in early 2020.

II. Conclusion

These developments, therefore, have a significant implication for the dynamics of power struggle and future roadmap to democracy in Myanmar. The present phase of democratisation, thus, augurs well for modernisation of Myanmar. Building up of a modern robust economy which is high on Human Development Index requires political transition in the country. Eradication of poverty, disease and hunger, better educational facilities and human resource development necessitates a shift towards democracy and a more responsible social welfare state. Unless the democratisation process becomes genuinely inclusive and credible, it will only serve the narrow interests of the military rulers of the erstwhile regime who drove Myanmar into isolation since last five decades. Therefore, genuine political change and consolidation of the reform process in Myanmar will be instrumental in helping it emerge as a ‘regional power.’

ENDNOTES

¹ Earlier version titled “Contemporary Myanmar: Challenges to Political Process and Reconciliation” was published as Research Paper No. 28, June 2013. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

² For details on SPDC see Mathews, Bruce (1998), “The Present Fortune of Tradition-Bound Authoritarianism in Myanmar”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 71(1), pp. 7-23.

³ Turnell, Sean (2011), “Myanmar in 2010: Doors open Doors Close”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 51(1) pp. 148-154. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/10.1525/as.2011.51.1.148>

⁴ 436. (a) “If it is necessary to amend the provisions of Sections 1 to 48 in Chapter I, Sections 49 to 56 in Chapter II, Sections 59 and 60 in Chapter III, Sections 74, 109, 141 and 161 in Chapter IV, Sections 200, 201, 248 and 276 in Chapter V, Sections 293, 294, 305, 314 and 320 in Chapter VI, Sections 410 to 432 in Chapter XI and Sections 436 in Chapter XII of this Constitution, it shall be amended with the prior approval of more than seventy-five percent of all the representatives of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, after which in a nation-wide referendum only with the votes of more than half of those who are eligible to vote”.

⁵ Consult Myanmar (2017), “Myanmar’s Military hold key to further Reforms”, August 22. Online Edition. Accessed on 15th November 2017. URL: <https://consult-myanmar.com/2017/08/22/myanmars-military-holds-key-to-further-reform/>

⁶ Islam, Syed Serajul (1996), “Myanmar’s Road to Socialism and Indonesia’s New Order: A Comparative Analysis”, *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 5(2), pp. 183-196.

⁷ Consult Myanmar (2017), *Opcit.*

⁸ The Diplomat (2016), “Militarism in Thailand and Myanmar a Role Reversal in the Making?” September 11. Online Edition. Accessed on April 14, 2017. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/05/militarism-in-thailand-and-myanmar-a-role-reversal-in-the-making/>

⁹ Buente (2016), *The End of Military Guided Electoral Authoritarianism: The 2015 Elections in Myanmar* Online Edition. Accessed on March 14, 2017. URL: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/16051910_176%20-%20WP%20-%20Dr%20Buente.pdf

¹⁰ (ibid).

¹¹ Murphy Erin, Matthew Turpin, and Peter Kucik (2015), Reforming Myanmar's Military, Prism 5. No. 3. Online Edition. Accessed on December 15, 2015. URL: http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-3/Reforming_Myanmar's_Military.pdf

¹² The Hindu (2012), "Myanmar's historic vote", April 7.

¹³ Than, Tin Maung Maung (2012), Burma/Myanmar's By-Elections: Will Personalities Trump Institutions? Asia Pacific Bulletin, No. 161, Washington, D.C.: East-West Center in Washington. Online Edition. Accessed on April 22, 2012. URL: <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/burmamyanmar%E2%80%99s-elections-will-personalities-trump-institutions>

¹⁴ Irrawaddy (2018), "NLD Embarks Internal Revamp Ahead 2020", January 5. Online Edition. Accessed on March 14, 2018. URL: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/nld-embarks-internal-revamp-ahead-2020-vote.html>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ ICG (2011), Myanmar's Post Election Landscape, Asia Briefing No. 118.

¹⁷ Based on interaction with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at her residence in Naypyitaw on March 7, 2013.

¹⁸ Mizzima (2017), "Second Panglong Conference Sees Significant Breakthroughs", June 1. Online Edition. Accessed on April 5, 2018. URL: <http://www.mizzima.com/news-opinion/second-panglong-conference-sees-significant-breakthroughs>

¹⁹ For details see, ICG (2016), Myanmar's Peace Process: Getting to a Political Dialogue, Asia Briefing No. 149.

Myanmar Times (2016), "Not without wrinkles, peace Conference lauded for taking landmark 'first steps'", September 5. Online Edition. Accessed on 15th November 2016. URL: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/22313-not-without-wrinkles-peace-conference-lauded-for-taking-landmark-first-steps.html>

²⁰ Mizzima (2017), "Second Panglong Conference Sees Significant Breakthroughs", June 1. Online Edition. Accessed on April 5, 2018. URL: <http://www.mizzima.com/news-opinion/second-panglong-conference-sees-significant-breakthroughs>

²¹ FPNCC consists of 7 EAOs four non-signatory groups that have previously signed bilateral ceasefire agreements: -- United Wa State Army, the Kachin Independence Army, the Mong La-based National Democratic Alliance Army, and the Shan State Army-North and three non-signatory groups that have never signed bilateral ceasefire agreements: the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the Arakan Army and the Kokang-based Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army.