

THE IRRAWADDY

- HOME
- BURMA
- ASIA
- BUSINESS
- OPINION
- FEATURE
- INTERVIEW
- MAGAZINE
- ARCHIVES
- SPORTS
- BLOG

Magazine

GUEST COLUMN

Beyond the National Convention

By Ashley South AUG, 2004 - VOLUME 12 NO.8

Burma's ceasefire groups look ahead.

It is never wise to try and second-guess the turn of events in Burma, but it's safe to say that the current constitution-drafting National Convention is widely perceived as illegitimate—both inside Burma and abroad. This perception won't change unless the process is broadened to include meaningful participation on the part of the National League for Democracy, or NLD, and the United Nationalities Alliance, or UNA, a coalition of ethnic nationality parties elected in 1990, which has always worked closely with the NLD.

Despite the legitimacy deficit of the constitution-drafting exercise, the convention has emerged as the most important political arena since the 1990 election—and perhaps even since the military takeover of 1962. For Burma's ethnic nationalist communities in particular, it represents a milestone in efforts to have their concerns registered on the national political stage.

Ceasefire groups speak

The 1,076 delegates to the convention are divided into eight categories: political parties, representatives-elect (MPs from 1990), national races, peasants, workers, intellectuals, state service personnel and representatives of 28 armed ethnic groups which have agreed to ceasefires with Rangoon since 1989.

The ceasefire groups are a mixed bunch, enjoying varying degrees of legitimacy. Nevertheless, they share several common concerns and have developed coherent positions on several key issues. Despite their reservations about the process most groups are attending the convention in good faith, in the hope of registering their aspirations on the national political agenda.

Can those insurgent groups which have "returned to the legal fold" use the ceasefire agreements to address some of the key issues which have structured armed conflict in Burma for over five decades? Participation in the convention seems at last to have created opportunities to focus on the "ethnic question" in Burmese politics.

Over the past few years, the Kachin Independence Organization, or KIO, and New Mon State Party, or NMSP, have taken the lead among a group of politically engaged ceasefire groups, in developing common positions on the main issues to be included in any negotiations with the military government—and the NLD.

In contrast however, several ex-communist and other militias in northern Burma have been accused of following the junta's line and of steering clear of politics, in order to concentrate on local community and economic development programs (including, in some cases, the drugs trade). Some analysts have expected the junta to offer further concessions to the ceasefire groups, in exchange for their support (or at least, acquiescence) in efforts to complete the convention.

- COMMENTS (0)
- RECOMMEND (107)
- FACEBOOK
- TWITTER
- PLUSONE
- MORE
- E-MAIL
- PRINT
- TEXT SIZE

- #### MORE ARTICLES IN THIS SECTION
- Asean and the Lady
 - Can the Opposition Remain Relevant?
 - India's Burma Dilemma
 - Between Democracy and Dictatorship
 - Clinging to 'Dwifungsi'
 - A Woman's Political Work is Never Done
 - No Good Options, Only Less Bad Ones
 - Decision Time
 - Time for a Policy Change
 - Cracks in the Castle Wall

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | [NEXT PAGE »](#)

COMMENTS (0)


Please read our policy before you post comments. [Click here](#)

Name:

E-mail: (Your e-mail will not be published.)

Comment:

You have 1000 characters left.

Word  Type the characters you see in the picture.

Verification:

Send Comment

[Code of Ethic](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Copyright](#) | [RSS](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Irrawaddy Store](#) | [Photo Store](#) | [Donation](#)

Copyright (c) 2008 Irrawaddy Publishing Group. All Rights Reserved.