Late on Monday night of June 1st, the Election Commission of Myanmar announced that the upcoming General elections for all categories will be held in November. This included 330 seats for the Lower House, 168 for the Upper House, 644 seats for State and Regional Parliaments and 29 for ethnic entities bringing the total to 1171 Parliamentary Seats up for grabs.

In a subsequent Press Conference held on June 4, U Myint Naing a member of the Election Commission announced that the elections are likely to take place of 8th of November.

Among the major Parties that would participate-

The Ruling Party NLD is said to have decided to go it alone and contest all the parliamentary seats of the two Houses Lower and Upper, State & Regional Parliaments.

The next prominent Party- the Army aligned USDP is looking for alliances but has not so far gained any other entity to contest jointly. The Party is said to be giving up the long-standing practice of favouring retired Military officers and are keen to get more local representatives to join the party.
When the Army drafted Constitution of 2008 was implemented, it is said that the Army was confident of running the Government with 25 percent of the Parliament already selected by the Army and with another minimum of 25 percent from the Army aligned parties like USDP. This happened only once and is not likely to be repeated. However much, the USDP may try, the impression among the public is that it is a military aligned party. For a short while soon after the Rohingya clearance operations the Army with its major PR Campaign and its Proxy the USDP were popular but it is no longer so. This position may not change in the near future.

There were some media reports that the Army Chief Ming Aung Hlaing is planning to contest the post of President. He had overshot his retirement age and is heard to have remarked that he has many years of experience in handling political developments.

The Ruling Party, the NLD however ruled out that the Military Chief will be nominated to the post. The senior Vice Presidents Post is already available to the Army and it would be easy for Gen Ming Aung Hliang to get nominated by the Army after retirement. But the General appears to be too ambitious and may not take up the post of Vice President.

An interesting development is the decision of the former 8888 cadres to contest the elections on their own. Those students in 1988 who took an active part in the student’s riots had made the maximum sacrifice in attempting to change the military controlled Government. They had to run for safety to the border and many went across the border to live in wilderness. On their return they tried to join the National league of Democracy and thus the political mainstream and for some unknown reason their offer was spurned.

In the last General Elections the 88 cadres volunteered and worked for the NLD candidates but their efforts were neither appreciated nor acknowledged. The 88 students are still an inchoate lot but they have formed a new party- Peoples Party and are contesting the elections on their banner. Reports indicate that they are yet to form a strategy and organise themselves into a well-united party machine. They may pullout some of the votes that would traditionally go to the NLD but beyond that they may not have any substantial number elected in any of the parliaments- the centre or the State. Their goals are limited. They are looking for a National Unity Government beyond 2020.

Another interesting Group would be the party led by former General ShweMan- the once powerful Speaker. His party is called UBP- United Betterment Party. ShweMan understands that it would be very difficult for any single party to form the Government after the 2020 Elections. He expects to be a part of a Coalition Government and aims to build a democratic Union.

The next would be the ethnic parties. In the last elections, most of the groups concentrated on the State and Regional elections and did not pay attention to the election to the main Parliament. They were too fragmented and many voted for the main Bamar-based parties like the NLD and the USDP. Surprisingly, the USDP performed well in the Shan area in the last elections.

But this time around the ethnic groups may not vote for the mainstream parties. They are already in the process of mergers seen amongst all the ethnics- the Karen, Mon, Chin, Kachin, Kayah. In view of the disturbed conditions in Rakhine State where the Arakan National Party
took the major seats, a free and fair election may not be possible there. It is also to be remembered that a large number of ethnics live in the Bamar region also and are widespread. In Yangon city one can see many Shans. There is a media report that NLD may get 40 percent of the seats and that the ethnics may get 20 percent and both together will form a majority.

It is too early to go into specific numbers at this stage and predict election results. But what is clear is that the National League for Democracy which literally swept the polls in the last election with 59.4 percent of the seats in both the upper and lower houses may not be able to produce another spectacular result this time.

The reasons are many. First is the incumbency factor. Second is the inability of the Government to change the mindset of the stubborn military to accept constitutional reforms and reduce their own hold on the Government. Third is the peace initiative that is going nowhere and this has antagonised almost all the armed ethnic outfits who may now support their own people to contest the elections. Fourth- is Suu Kyi’s popularity that had surged briefly when she went to the Hague to defend the Government and its Army on accusations of Genocide of Rohingyas is now back to normal levels. Fifth: Her Party- the NLD wants to go it all alone. This may not work and she may lose votes in crucial constituencies. Suu Kyi is still revered and she cannot be written off. She is the only popular leader left and can still carry the people to some extent. Finally the civil war that is going on in Northern Rakhine and Paletwa area and the Government has no clue as to how to handle it.

We will still have to wait and see the trends and not go for specific numbers

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