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New Government in Myanmar: Profiles of Ministers

On March 30, 2011, a new government was born in Myanmar. On this, the 18th and final day of the regular session of Parliament convened on January 31 in accordance with the 2010 general election, Prime Minister Thein Sein took office as president, with First Secretary of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Tin Aung Myint Oo¹ and Sai Mauk Kham (of the Shan, an ethnic minority) as vice presidents. All three had already been elected to their positions as president or vice president in a vote in Parliament on February 4, and on March 30 each took the following oath in accordance with the 2008 Constitution in front of Speaker Khin Aung Myint at the inauguration ceremony in Parliament.

“I, (name), do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will be loyal to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the citizens and hold always in esteem non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty. I will uphold and abide by the Constitution and its Laws. I will carry out the responsibilities uprightly to the best of my ability and strive for further flourishing the eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality. I will dedicate myself to the service of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.”

(Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Article 65)

Before the oath of office, Speaker Khin Aung Myint read SPDC Notification No.5/2011 (March 30, 2011) indicating that the SPDC has transferred legislative, executive, and judiciary powers to the individuals elected and approved by Parliament, and that the SPDC was thereby dissolved. This marked the end of the military government that had taken power through a coup d'état on September 18, 1988. The long military rule lasted 22 and a half years.

What are the characteristics of the new administration headed by President Thein Sein, and what are its aims? Are changes to be expected? Let us consider the direction of the new administration, while examining the members of the new cabinet.

On February 9, before his inauguration, President Thein Sein had already submitted to Parliament a list of 30 cabinet members to be part of his new administration, and had obtained

¹ His name is often written “Thiha Thura Tin Aung Mint Oo.” However, “Thiha Thura” is an honorary title bestowed on military personnel for meritorious service. His actual name is Tin Aung Myint Oo. The honorary title has been omitted in this paper.

approval. However, at that point in time it was not known who would be taking what post. Immediately after his inauguration, President Thein Sein issued President Office Order No.4/2011 (March 30, 2011), appointing the 30 cabinet members to their individual posts (Table 1). This marked the start of the new cabinet headed by President Thein Sein.

Table 1 Union Ministers

(as of March 30, 2011)

No	Ministry of	Name	Previous Office ¹⁾	Military Rank when retired ²⁾	Parliamentary Status ³⁾	Estimated Age ⁴⁾
	President	Thein Sein	Prime Minister	General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	66
	Vice President	Tin Aung Myint Oo	SPDC First Secretary	General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	61
	Vice President	Sai Mauk Kham	Physician	Civilian	National Assbly	61
1	Defence	Hla Min	Commander of No.3 Bureau of Special Operations	Major General	Military	55
2	Home Affairs	Ko Ko	Former Commander of No.3 Bureau of Special Operations	Lieutenant General	Military	55
3	Border Affairs	Thein Htay	Deputy Minister for Defence	Major General	Military	56
	Myanmar Industrial Development		Chief of Defence Industries			
4	Foreign Affairs	Wunna Maung Lwin	Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva	Colonel (Rtrd.)	Private	59
5	Information	Kyaw Hsan	remained as the same post	Brigadier General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
	Culture		-			
6	Agriculture and Irrigation	Myint Hlaing	Chief of Air Defence Forces	Lieutenant General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	58
7	Forestry	Win Tun	Managing Director, Myanmar Timber Enterprise	Lieutenant Colonel (Rtrd.)	Private	59
8	Finance and Revenue	Hla Tun	remained as the same post	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	60

9	Construction	Khin Maung Myint	remained as the same post	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	60
10	National Planning and Economic Development	Tin Naing Thein	Minister for Commerce	Brigadier General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	57
	Livestock and Fisheries					
11	Commerce	Win Myint	President, Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry	Civilian	National Assbly	57
12	Communications, Posts and Telegraphs	Thein Tun	Deputy Minister for Communications, Posts and Telegraphs	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	64
13	Labour	Aung Kyi	remained as the same post	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	65
	Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement		Minister for Relations ⁵⁾			
14	Mines	Thein Htaik	Inspector-General of Ministry of Defence	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	59
15	Cooperatives	Ohn Myint	Commander of No.6 Bureau of Special Operations	Lieutenant General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	57
16	Transport	Nyan Tun Aung	Deputy Minister for Transport	Colonel Air (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
17	Hotels and Tourism	Tint Hsan	Managing Director, ACE Construction Group Co., Ltd.	Civilian	People's Assbly	55
	Sports					
18	Industry (1)	Kyaw Swa Khaing	Deputy Minister for Industry (2)	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
19	Industry (2)	Soe Thein	Commander-in-Chief (Navy)	Vice-Admiral (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
20	Rail Transportation	Aung Min	remained as the same post	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	62
21	Energy	Than Htay	Deputy Minister for	Brigadier General	People's	57

			Energy	(Rtrd.)	Assbly	
22	Electric Power No. (1)	Zaw Min	remained as the same post	Colonel (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	60
23	Electric Power No. (2)	Khin Maung Soe	Chairman, Yangon Electricity Supply Board	n.a. (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	61
24	Education	Mya Aye	Rector, Mandalay University	Civilian	People's Assbly	60
25	Health	Pe Thet Khin	Rector, Institute of Medicine (1), Yangon	Civilian	Private	55
26	Religious Affairs	Myint Maung	remained as the same post	Brigadier General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	70
27	Science and Technology	Aye Myint	Deputy Minister for Defence	Major General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
28	Immigration and Population	Khin Yi	Chief of Myanmar Police Force	Brigadier General (Rtrd.)	Private	59
29	President Office	Thein Nyunt	Minister for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs	Colonel (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	63
	(Chariman, Nay Pyi Taw Council)		(Chairman, Naypyidaw Development Committee and Mayor, Naypyidaw City)			
30	President Office	Soe Maung	Judge Advocate General of Ministry of Defence	Lieutenant General (Rtrd.)	People's Assbly	59

(Notes) 1) The most recent known office, if the immediately preceding one is not known.

2) The rank at the time of resignation, if the individual has resigned.

3) "People's Assbly" indicates a popularly elected member of the People's Assembly, and "National Assbly" indicates a popularly elected member of the National Assembly. "Military" indicates a military officer (not military member of Parliament) nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services. "Private" indicates a civilian who is not a member of Parliament.

4) The number of years obtained by subtracting the year of birth from 2011. This indicates the age the individual will become in 2011. Accordingly, the individual's age at this point in time may be younger by one year. In addition, because the government of Myanmar has not released the official backgrounds of the cabinet members, the date of birth is unconfirmed in some cases.

5) Newly established on October 8, 2007 for communication between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi.

(Source) The author created this table with reference to President Office Order No. 4 (March 30, 2011), Yearbook of Asian Affairs (Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO, various numbers), and a variety of media releases, etc.

The new cabinet is composed of 33 members, including the president and two vice presidents. All members are male, and the average age is 60. As of 2011, Minister of Religious Affairs Myint Maung (70), President Thein Sein (66), and Minister of Labor Aung Kyi (65) are relatively more advanced in age, but most other cabinet members are approximately 60 years old. On the other hand, the youngest member is 55 years old, so no member can be considered particularly young. It can be said that individuals with experience in the military or governmental organizations who will be able to complete their 5-year terms of office have been selected.

Looking at the new cabinet, there is a sense that it is a solid lineup that has been selected with a focus on stability and continuity. It appears that issues of personnel have been approached with care to prevent any confusion during the transition of power.

To begin with, the appointment of former Prime Minister Thein Sein to the office of President is evidence of the emphasis that the new administration has placed on stability and continuity. President Thein Sein graduated from the Defence Services Academy (DSA), a military school for the training of military leaders, in 1967. He is an elite officer who is the second eldest of all cabinet members except Myint Maung, Minister for Religious Affairs. President Thein Sein participated as a council member when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was reorganized as the SPDC on November 15, 1997. Subsequently, he was appointed Second Secretary of the SPDC in August 2003, then First Secretary of the SPDC in October 2004. When then-Prime Minister Soe Win was hospitalized in Singapore in May 2007, Thein Sein was appointed interim Prime Minister. Prime Minister Soe Win passed away on October 12 of the same year, and on the 24th of that month Thein Sein was appointed Prime Minister, a post that he held until becoming President. He is also the head of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) that won the 2010 general election.²

President Thein Sein has abundant experience in government and foreign diplomacy and a mild-mannered personality, and is seen as being relatively untouched by corruption. It is also believed that he has the deep trust of former SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe. However, President Thein Sein's chronic heart disease is said to have made him reluctant to take the office of President, which is an exhausting 5-year post. Taking into consideration his background, personality, age, and health, it is unlikely that, for better or worse, President Thein Sein will proactively execute leadership and work for radical reforms. However, such a

² However, the 2008 Constitution prohibits the President from engaging in activities of political parties (Article 64). President Thein Sein has stopped his activities as chairman of the USDP. Instead of him, Shwe Mann, Speaker of the People's Assembly, took the office of vice chairman of the USDP, and is supposed to perform as de facto party leader.

cautious approach may actually have given a sense of security to former Chairman Senior General Than Shwe, who is to retire from the front stage of power and practical affairs of the state³, resulting in his selection as President. This is a point of differentiation from former Joint Chief of Staff of the Army, Navy, and Air Forces Shwe Mann, who, although a powerful figure within the military and one of the individuals rumored to be a candidate for appointment as President, was ultimately appointed Speaker of the People's Assembly, for the most part an honorary post.

The focus on stability and continuity can also be seen in the previous posts of the new ministers. Ministers whose names are colored in the Previous Post column in Table 1 are those who remained in the same post, were transferred horizontally from other ministries, promoted from a deputy minister position, or otherwise transferred from a highly related post. Such an approach to personnel was applied to 23 of the 33 cabinet members. For example, Vice President Tin Aung Myint Oo, who is expected to handle economic issues in the new cabinet, was the chair of the Trade Council that determined economic policy during the period of military rule. The Deputy Minister of Defense was appointed Minister of Border Affairs, who is nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services. The Minister of Border Affairs serves concurrently as the Minister of Myanmar Industrial Development, a newly established post. It is believed that this is related to his history of serving as the Chief of Defense Industries in the Defense Ministry. The ambassador to the United Nations office in Geneva was promoted to Minister of Foreign Affairs, the managing director of Myanmar Timber Enterprise was promoted to Minister of Forestry, and the Deputy Minister of Communications, Posts, and Telegraphs was promoted to Minister of that ministry. The rector of Mandalay University and the rector of Institute of Medicine No.1, Yangon, were appointed Minister of Education and Minister of Health (the governing agencies for each), respectively. Both cases can also be viewed as internal promotion. The appointment of the chairman of Yangon Electricity Supply Board as Minister of Electric Power No. (2) is another case of appointment to a post with a strong connection to their previous works. Moreover, in addition to personnel in the cabinet, Minister Thein Nyunt of the President's Office, who was chairman of the Naypyidaw Development Committee, has concurrent duties as the chairman of the Naypyidaw Council and Mayor of Naypyidaw City. In this manner, the allocation of personnel for the new cabinet emphasized continuity from the military government.

³ General Min Aung Hlaing attended the inauguration of President Thein Sein conducted in Parliament on March 30, 2011 as the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, and Lieutenant General Soe Win attended as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services. This suggests that Senior General Than Shwe and Vice-Senior General Maung Aye have resigned from their posts as Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, respectively.

Naturally, this lineup of personnel means that retired military officers hold many of the cabinet posts. Military officers on active duty are limited to the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minister of Border Affairs, who are nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, as stipulated in the Constitution. There are 25 retired military officers, all of whom retired with a rank of colonel or higher. Five of the cabinet members are not affiliated with the military: Vice President Sai Mauk Kham (physician), Minister of Commerce Win Myint (President, Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry), Minister of Hotels and Tourism and Minister of Sports Tint Hsan (managing director of a construction company), Minister of Education Mya Aye (Rector, Mandalay University), and Minister of Health Pe Thet Khin (Rector, Institute of Medicine (1), Yangon). Even so, considering that only two of the 31 cabinet members (Minister of Education and Minister of Health) were pure citizens immediately before the SPDC was dissolved, the number of civilian ministers increased in this cabinet. Excluding Vice President Sai Mauk Kham, who has significant political implications, the appointment of the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry as Minister of Commerce, an important post, is worthy of praise. In the past, the military government did not lend an ear to the voices of the private sector, and was criticized as being “economic tone deaf.” The advent of Minister of Commerce Win Myint has generated the expectation that the views of the business world will be reflected in the economic policies of the new government.⁴

Out of the 33 cabinet members, 24 are members of the People’s Assembly, two are members of the National Assembly, three are military officers (not military representatives of Parliament) nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services, and four are civilians (not elected members of Parliament). As of the November 2010 general election, the four civilians were engaged as civil servants, and were unable to stand as candidates for Parliament.⁵ Former police chief Khin Yi, who handled issues related to Aung San Suu Kyi, is included in this number. However, in any case, the President, Vice Presidents, and cabinet members are required to resign from Parliament and civil service upon assuming their posts. In addition, if they are members of a political party, they are prohibited from participating in party activities during their terms of office (Constitution Articles 63, 64, and 232).

The seven Region and seven State governments were also established, and chief ministers were appointed by President Thein Sein by President Office Order No.9/2011 dated March 30, 2011 (Table 2). Similar to the union level ministers, most of chief ministers are retired military

⁴ On July 1, 2011, the new government made reduction in export taxes from 10% to 7%, reflecting a predicament of exporters due to strong kyat, local currency, against US dollar. This could be an example of flexibility of the new government.

⁵ Civil Services personnel are not entitled to be elected as members of parliaments (Constitution Article 121 and others).

officers, and their previous military and/or government posts are highly related with the present ones.

Table 2 Chief Ministers of States and Regions

(as of March 30, 2011)

No	Name	State and Region	Previous Posts ¹⁾	Party
1	La John Ngan Hsai	Kachin State	Businessman	USDP
2	Khin Maung Oo (or) Bu Yal	Kayah State	n.a.	USDP
3	Zaw Min (Brigadier General)	Kayin State	Chairman, Kayin State Peace and Development Council	Military Rep.
4	Hong Ngai	Chin State	Chairman, Chin State Peace and Development Council	USDP
5	Ohn Myint	Mon State	Minister for Mines	USDP
6	Hla Maung Tin	Rakhine State	n.a. (Retired Colonel)	USDP
7	Aung Myat (or) Sao Aung Myat	Shan State	Light Infantry Division 66	USDP
8	Tha Aye	Sagain Region	Member, SPDC	USDP
9	Phone Maw Shwe	Magway Region	Chairman, Magway Region Peace and Development Council	USDP
10	Ye Myint	Mandalay Region	Chief, Military Security Affairs	USDP
11	Nyan Win	Bago Region	Minister for Foreign Affairs	USDP
12	Khin Zaw	Taninthayi Region	Commander of No.6 Bureau of Special Operations	USDP
13	Myint Swe	Yangon Region	Commander of No.5 Bureau of Special Operations	USDP
14	Thein Aung	Ayeyawaddy Region	Minister for Forestry	USDP

(Notes) 1) The most recent known office, if the immediately preceding one is not known.

(Source) The author created this table with reference to President Office Order No. 9 (March 30, 2011), *Yearbook of Asian Affairs* (Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO, various numbers), and a variety of media releases, etc.

The preceding was a consideration of the characteristics of the new cabinet and an examination of the members. The makeup of the new cabinet emphasizes stability and continuity, and drastic changes to policy from the period of military rule can hardly be expected. However, the appointment of a businessman as Minister of Commerce and other

personnel allocation give a sense of change, although limited. It will be necessary to watch the direction of the new government carefully in the future.