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With the exception of two ethnic armed groups that have indicated acceptance, the ethnic groups and the government appear to be locked into a stalemate, both sides trying to buy time and avoid outright hostilities.

In spite of growing tensions, the regime has taken no action against the hold-out cease-fire militias, only extended its deadlines. The first deadline was October 2009, which was pushed back to December 2009; and the latest deadline was Feb. 28.

Many observers say the regime seems to be in a dilemma over its plan to create ethnic border guard forces.

In separate negotiations with the regime, the strongest cease-fire group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), has called for an autonomous state and the Kachin Independence Army has proposed a federal union based on the spirit of the Panlong Agreement in 1947.

After several meeting with Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the regime negotiator, the latest meeting took place in Kengtung on Feb. 25, where the UWSA asked again for more time for further discussion.

Another strong cease-fire group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), recently said that it wants to maintain its current status as an ally of the Burmese regime rather than transform into a border guard force, according to sources close to the DKBA.

One source said the DKBA first agreed to form a border guard force, but now does not want to serve under the command of government officers.

Negotiations will take place, said the source. He did not rule out military resistance if the Burmese regime tries to force the DKBA to comply. However, he said that so far there has been no pressure on the DKBA.

Observers believe that the junta will first deal with the UWSA and KIA, which have much stronger armies.

Many observers believe that the border guard force issue could be a factor in delaying the announcement of the election law, party registration rules and the date of the election.

In a state-run newspaper, junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe has said the election will be held “soon,” and he has repeatedly urged the people of Burma to get ready to vote this year.

Observers say the junta is exercising great caution in dealing with the cease-fire militias to try to avoid military clashes in the run-up to the election, which is widely anticipated for sometime in the fall.

In an interview with *The Irrawaddy*, Aung Kyaw Zaw, who observes cease-fire groups on the Sino-Burmese border, said, “The Burmese regime is in the middle of a major crisis [to complete the border guard force order].”

No hostilities over the guard force order have broken out so far. However, the UWSA has warned it will open fire if Burmese government troops enter their controlled areas, while the KIA has said it is prepared to defend itself.

Lapai Naw Din, the editor of the Thailand-based *Kachin News Group*, said, “I think they [the junta and KIA] will carefully compromise until they reach a bilateral agreement.”

Saeng Juen, an editor of the Chiang Mai-based *Shan Herald Agency for News*, said that the Burmese regime especially wants to avoid battles with the Wa because of the huge disruption it would cause along the Sino-Burmese border.

“Than Shwe seems to be unwilling to take action against the armed groups now. He doesn't want his election to be ruined,” he said. “For that matter, the cease-fire groups are also buying time.”