

With the emergence of new political players after the Nov. 7 election, there has been an assumption that the opposition movement led by the National League for Democracy (NLD) will effectively be marginalized in post-election politics in Burma.

But in the run-up to the election, the 1990 ethnic political parties that won alongside NLD candidates have issued a statement titled “Declaration of Decision in Kalay Township,” which supports a second Panglong statement with four basic political goals.

The four goals are an end to dictatorship, to restore democracy, to promote human rights and to bring about national reconciliation with the united support of all nationalities.

Moreover, the statement reaffirmed the importance of a federal democratic system while rejecting the unitary system enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. It also rejected any cessation from the union, a charge leveled against ethnic groups by the junta throughout its history.

The first Panglong conference was held in February 1947. Ethnic leaders were united under the leadership of Gen Aung San, in order to attain independence from the British.

In the new statement, ethnic political leaders reaffirmed the leadership of the opposition democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Gen Aung San, to work for national unity.

The statement was signed by ethnic leaders at the 22nd Anniversary of the Zomi National Congress (ZNC), held in Kalay Township in Sagaing Division on Oct. 24. Among the groups supporting the statement were the NLD, ZNC, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), Karen National Congress for Democracy (KNCD) and the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA). Many of the ethnic political parties contested and won in the 1990 election.

The second Panlong statement could be a significant move forward on the part of the NLD and ethnic groups, designed to strengthen the democratic movement and assert leadership in the new political landscape.

For the NLD, it represents a follow-up action to its recent announcement that it will seek opportunities to talk to leaders of ethnic cease-fire groups under its long-term pursuit of genuine national reconciliation.

Although the junta dissolved the NLD, the party's leadership has been working to expand its activities by conducting organizational tours in ethnic states under the leadership of chairman Tin Oo and secretary Win Tin.

In the past, the junta effectively blocked communication channels between the NLD and ethnic cease-fire groups. The current step forward represents progress, if the NLD can forge a working relationship with the cease-fire groups.

This accelerating dynamic could serve as a focal point for Suu Kyi's re-engagement in politics, after her presumed release on Nov. 13, one week after the election. Under her leadership, the

democratic opposition and ethnic groups could continue to play an important role in post-election politics.

The Burmese people have long believed that only Suu Kyi can bring about national reconciliation. The second Panglong conference is in fact what Suu Kyi called for in the national reconciliation effort of 1988-89 when she arrived in Panglong during a tour of Shan State.

For better or for worse, a new political dynamic out of the parliamentary process will exist after the election. The second Panglong statement by the NLD and ethnic group leaders could offer a framework to strengthen the democratic opposition while working toward genuine national reconciliation.