

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.1

OFFICIAL MEDIA

13, 274 PRISONERS RELEASED UNDER PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

A total 13,274 prisoners, 11,124 men and 2,150 women, were released under a Presidential pardon issued under Order No (1/2014) dated 2 January 2014. According to state-run media, the prisoners were released in accordance with Section (a) of the Constitution with the aim of contributing to peace and stability of the State, rule of law and national reconsolidation and focusing humanitarian grounds to the honour 66th Anniversary Independence Day. *(Please Annex A for full text of the Presidential Pardon).*¹

PRESIDENT MEETS KNU LEADERS

President Thein Sein met Chairman of the Karen National Union (KNU) Saw Mutu Sae Po on 5 January. At the talks, the President and Mutu Sae Po discussed progress on a nationwide ceasefire, ongoing programs for political dialogue after reaching a ceasefire agreement and plans to build mutual trust. Both sides also reaffirmed that dialogue is the way to reach permanent peace and stressed the need for all the organizations to harmoniously strive to fulfil the aspiration of the people for peace. The KNU Chairman also held a meeting with Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the Bayintnaung Yeiktha on 5 January and had cordial discussions on the peace-making processes, regional development, ongoing processes in line with democracy and further strengthening relations between the government and the KNU.²

JOINT COMMITTEE TO REVIEW CONSTITUTION MEETS

The Constitutional Review Joint Committee held its (1/2014) on 7 January. At the meeting, Deputy Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Secretary of the Committee Nanda Kyaw Swa clarified the matters related to holding meetings, releasing information about the committee, receiving suggestions and plans to form five constitution review committees with Hluttaw representatives and defence services personnel Hluttaw representatives. Reports presented by committee members on reviewing the Constitution was also discussed during the meeting. The Constitutional Reviewing Committee in its press released on 31 December, state that it had received a total of 323,110 suggestions on the Constitution. *(Please see Appendix B for full text of Press Release).*³

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS JAPANESE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION

President Thein Sein and Japanese House of Representatives member and Chairman of the Burma-Japan Parliamentarian Friendship League Ichiro Aisawa held talks on cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency-JICA and Official Development Assistance loans from Japan and matters related to opening of Japanese banks in Burma. The delegation also held meetings with Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann and the Chairman of the Union Election Commission (UEC) Tin Aye, who assured Mr Aisawa and party that Burma's elections in 2015 will be free and fair. Thura Shwe Mann and Ichiro Aisawa in their meeting, exchanged views

¹ 13,274 prisoners released under Pardon –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-06-red.pdf> (NLM) 6 January 2014 (p. 1)/
Presidential Pardon –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-03-red.pdf> (NLM) 3 January 2014 (p. 1)

² Dialogue should be only way to reach eternal peace. President meets Mutu Sae Po –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-06-red.pdf> (NLM) 6 January 2014 (p. 1)/
C-in-C meets with chairman of KNU –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-06-red.pdf> (NLM) 6 January 2014 (p. 16)

³ Joint committee to review Constitution meets –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-01.pdf> (NLM) 1 January 2014 (p. 0)

on formation of parliamentary friendship associations between the parliaments as well further strengthening bilateral ties and cooperation between Burma and Japan.⁴

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RECEIVES DANISH MINISTER TO DISCUSS INVESTMENT, AID

President Thein Sein and Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Rasmus Helveg Petersen held talks on a range of development issues, including investment, Danish humanitarian aid for the rehabilitation in Rakhine State and technical assistance in the agriculture and livestock farming sector. During the meeting at the Presidential Palace on 9 January, they also discussed the launch of a strategic cooperation plan between Burma and Denmark next year. The Danish Minister said that his visit also represents his country's support and encouragement for a democratic reform process in Burma, adding that Denmark has ordered debts relief as reforms in Burma were gaining momentum.⁵

PYIDAUNGSU HLUTTAW SPEAKER CALLS FOR THOUGHTFUL REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION

Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw, has said that a review of the constitution should not harm the current stability, peace making process and democratic transition. Speaking at three separate meetings with local people from Myaungmya, Labutta and Patheingyi districts in Ayeyawady Region on 9 January.

The Speaker suggested several objectives – to improve the situation without out harming the country's current stability, to encourage peace, national unity and national reconciliation and to achieve progress without harming the democratic transition and that it was necessary to take these things into account when amending the constitution.

He also stressed the importance of long-term objectives when reviewing the constitution, saying that it would be a mistake if things that should be changed are not changed and if things that should not be changed are changed hurriedly. Practicing democracy should be based on the history of a country and it is impossible to copy the democratic system of other countries, he added.

He also urged the people to cooperate with them as part of efforts to conduct the poverty alleviation programmes laid down by the president. The speaker also pledged, on behalf of MPs, that they will work in the best interest of the people in terms of introducing laws.⁶

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

FIVE GROUPS APPOINTED TO STUDY 300,000 CHARTER AMENDMENT SUGGESTIONS

The joint parliamentary committee appointed to review the constitution has appointed five groups to study the more than 300,000 submissions it has received that propose changes to the charter, Pyithu Hluttaw MP Thura Aung Ko told news media sources on 7 January.

Thura Aung Ko, who said the submissions to the 108 member committee had been sent from inside and outside the country, chairs one of the groups. Excluding the chairman and deputy chairman of the joint committee, the groups have a total of 106 members, he said.

⁴ President U Thein Sein meets Japan-Myanmar Parliamentary Friendship League Chairman – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 January 2014 (p. 1)/
UEC assures 2015 elections will be free and fair – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 January 2014 (p. 1)/
Establishment of parliamentary friendship associations discussed – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 January 2014 (p. 16 &9)

⁵ President U Thein Sein, Danish Minister discuss investment, aid – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 January 2014 (p. 16)

⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker calls for thoughtful review of Constitution – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 January 2014 (p. 16)

One of the groups has 17 civilian hluttaw representatives, including its chair, Thura Aye Myint, and five Tatmadaw hluttaw representatives. Each of the other groups, which are headed by Thura Aung Ko, Thein Zaw, Thein Swe and Soe Naing, have 16 civilian and five Tatmadaw hluttaw representatives.

Thura Aung Ko said his group had been tasked to study submissions concerning the chapter of the constitution relating to legislative, judicial and administration matters. "Every chapter of the constitution is important," he said. "But the chapter we are going to review is more important. We are honoured to be assigned with this task". The other chapters have been allocated among the other groups.

Dr Zaw Myint, a member of the group headed by Thura Aung Ko, said they were due to begin studying the submissions on January 8 and would submit their recommendations to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw by January 31.⁷

Political parties representing Myanmar's ethnic minorities have called for constitutional amendments that would give states and regions more financial independence. Parties which have called for amendments to the taxation rights of the states and regions include the Pa-O National Organization, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party. The ethnic parties have conveyed their suggestions in submissions to the joint parliamentary constitution review committee which is due to present its report to the Pyindaungsu Hluttaw by 31 January.

Among the 58 suggestions to the committee from the Pa-O National Organization is a proposal to expand the power and authority of the state and regional governments to collect taxes. The Pa-O National Organization (PNO) had also proposed that the central government share more power with the states and regions, said U Khun Maung Thaug, a Pyithu Hluttaw MP and member of the PNO's constitution amending council.

Boe Aung, a central committee member of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), said that as well as calling for greater taxation rights, the SNDP had also called for an amendment to the constitutional provision which puts limits of who may become president.

Aung Mya Kyaw, of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), said the taxation system was unfair to the states and regions. "If they really want true fairness, they need to provide power and authority equally among the states, regions and central government," Aung Mya Kyaw said.

Meanwhile, the joint parliamentary constitution review committee has revealed that it received more than 320,000 submissions from the public, political parties and organizations before a December 31 deadline.

ETHNIC ALLIANCE PARTY FUP READY TO SIGN UP PARTY MEMBERS

After receiving official party status on 24 December 2013, the Federal Union Party (FUP) is set to sign up members in 2014. "Now that our party has become an official party, we have three months to submit [the names of] one thousand party members to the election commission. If we cannot do this, our party will automatically be dissolved and become unofficial," said Saw Than Myint, a senior figure in the FUP.

The FUP will select its executive members by the end of January and open its main office in Rangoon. A branch office will also open in Mandalay.

⁷ Five groups appointed to study 300,000 charter amendment suggestions – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/10801-five-groups-appointed-to-study-300-000-charter-amendment-suggestions> (Mizzima) 8 January 2014

“We have been gathering party members since before our party become official. Of course these were unofficial members. But now these members will become official [members],” added Saw Than Myint, who comes from the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, one of 16 parties that joined forces to form the FUP. Nai Chan Htoy another party representative from Mon State said the party will announce more of its plans after the full EC meeting later this month.

Comprised of 16 parties from the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), the FUP’s chief objective is to contest seats in the 2015 elections in regions where no ethnic party is based. Papers for the party’s registration were first submitted to the election commission in August 2013.⁸

SKIRMISHES BREAK OUT BETWEEN PALAUNG, TA’ANG ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS AND GOV’T ARMY

Skirmishes broke out three times between government troops and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta’ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) in Kyaukme and Namtsan Townships of Shan State on 4 January according to reports of the PSLF/TNLA.

There have been nearly 40 instances of fighting between the two groups since the first peace talks were held between the government and the PSLF/TNLA were held at the end of July 2013.

“We have learned that the fighting broke out in Maingngaw and Namttwe villages in Kyaukme Township. The two groups confronted each other while in transit. Currently, there is no discussion between the two sides. Nearly 30 or 40 skirmishes have taken place since the Muse discussion. It is incumbent on the government’s negotiators to hold peace talks. They [the government] said they have been very busy,” said Tar Joke Gar, vice-chairperson of the PSLF/TNLA.

On 4 January, a clash broke out between government troops and a combined force of the PSLF/TNLA and a KIA-affiliated brigade in Pansayi village in Namtsan Township.

Although the government’s Peacemaking Work Committee (PWC) and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta’ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) held discussions on 31 July to sign ceasefire agreements, skirmishes between the two sides have continued. To date there have been no individual discussions between the Peacemaking Work Committee and the PSLF/TNLA. However, the PSLF/TNLA did send representatives to a meeting held in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State in early November last year after the Laiza conference in Kachin State. That meeting was attended by the PWC and the National Ceasefire Coordination Team, which was formed by ethnic armed groups and comprised of thirteen leaders.⁹

UK CONDUCTS TRAINING COURSE ON MANAGING DEFENCE FOR BURMESE MILITARY

The Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, in collaboration with Cranfield University, started two-week educational course on managing defence in the wider security context in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 January according to the British Embassy in Yangon.

Twenty-two high-ranking officers from the Tatmadaw (Burmese armed forces) and eight senior officials from government and other agencies are attending the course, which focuses on such topics as governance in transitional democracies, accountability and transparency, international humanitarian law and human rights.

⁸ Ethnic alliance party FUP ready to sign up party members – <http://monnews.org/2014/01/02/ethnic-alliance-party-fup-ready-sign-party-members/> (IMNA) 2 January 2014

⁹ Skirmishes break out between Palaung, Ta’ang ethnic armed groups and gov’t army – www.elevenmyanmar.com/national/4653-skirmishes-break-out-between-palaung-ta-ang-ethnic-armed-groups-and-gov-t-army (Eleven News Media) 6 January 2014

Domestic legal frameworks for security, governance, the strategic context, human rights, leadership, security sector reform and policy formulation, accountability and transparency, civil-military relations, democratic control of armed forces, and international law are covered in the first week of the training. The lectures in the second week will focus on defence management.

The course also includes modules on civil-military relations and the civilian and democratic control of armed forces. A case study on Northern Ireland will be used to illustrate some lectures.

Col Tony Stern, the British Embassy's defence attaché, described the training as a flagship defence engagement course that provides valuable lessons and practical advice to transitional democracies on security related issues. "The UK recognises the very real political developments that have taken place in Burma in the recent past. It is intended that developing deeper military-to-military relations, based on a common appreciation of and adherence to international norms and standards, will assist Burma as it continues its political transformation," he said.

Stern expressed his satisfaction with instructors and participants, adding that both parties are learning much from each other. "The course has started extremely well. The participants are very engaged in the discussions and are receptive to the education. The commitment to learn is clear and it is good to see the exchange of ideas," he said. He also expressed his hope that the course would provide further opportunities for the development of military-to-military relations between the two countries.¹⁰

ETHNIC GROUPS VOICE CONCERN OVER CENSUS CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Ethnic groups in Burma have expressed concern about the way a national census to be carried out in March classifies ethnic sub-groups, saying that the categories used create confusion and unnecessary divisions.

"Some Karen sub-groups, such as the Kecho and Kebar, have been classified as Karenni, based on government data from 1983," said Naw Sah Htoo, a central executive committee member of the Kayin Peoples Party, noting one of the more egregious errors.

The issue was discussed at a workshop in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State, on 9 January. Three Karen community-based organizations represented at the workshop said they would object to the census being conducted unless the Kecho, Kebar and Pa-O were reclassified as Karen sub-groups.

It was also noted that a new "Mon-Karen" group had been created under the label Sar Phyu. The label is supposed to designate Karen who sided with the Mon when they were at war with the ethnic Burmans in the pre-modern era. However, some who attended the workshop pointed out that it is actually the name of a belief system followed by some Karen. "Some people were forced to change their ethnicity in the past based on their religion. But a Karen is a Karen, whether they are Buddhist or Christian," said Daw Naw Sah Htoo.

Tu Ja, the chairman of the Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), said that all sub-groups should be properly classified as belonging to larger groups, rather than labelled in isolation. "There are six or seven Kachin sub-groups, but they should all be counted as Kachin, and only then should they be identified by their sub-group," he said, warning that treating each subgroup as completely distinct would harm national reconciliation efforts and reduce trust between ethnic groups and the government. He added that most ethnic people in Burma, including the Kachin, Mon, Shan, Karen and Arakanese, doubted the validity of the government's official tally of 135 recognized ethnic groups.

¹⁰ UK conducts training course on managing defence for Myanmar military – http://elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4682:uk-conducts-training-course-on-managing-defence-for-myanmar-military&catid=44:national&Itemid=384 (Eleven News Media) 9 January 2014

Sai Than Maung, of the Shan Population Collecting Committee, said that his committee ignores the government's division of the Shan into 30 sub-groups, choosing instead to treat them all as belonging to one group, the Shan.

Mon civil society activist Mi Kon Chan Non also said that census takers should be able to speak ethnic languages in order to ensure that they get an accurate count of how many people belong to each group. However, she noted that there are also other obstacles to getting an accurate figure. "I think the Mon in Rangoon will continue to identify themselves as Burmese because it isn't easy for them to change their ethnic identity on their National Identification Cards," she said.

Cherry Zahau, a Chin human rights activist, said that Chin communities generally disagree with the practice of labelling people according to their ethnic sub-groups. "Our official objection on this will come soon," she said, adding that both the government and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which is assisting with the census, should have collaborated more closely with ethnic communities from the beginning, instead of waiting until the middle of last month to consult with them. "It should not be done in a rushed manner, as this is the first time in 30 years that Burma will have a census," she said.¹¹

ANALYSIS

The granting of a Presidential pardon and meetings with ethnic KNU leaders in the New Year augurs well for the national reconciliation process in Burma. However, continued skirmishes between government troops and ethnic armed groups in Kyaukme and Namtsan Townships, Shan State will cast further doubts towards the on-going peace process. Burma is now entering a sensitive stage in its political transition and signs of progress under the leadership of President Thein Sein have emerged. The democratic reforms are at an early stage and the debate in parliament to amend the 2008 Constitution will no doubt become a pivotal factor in shaping the political developments in 2014 and beyond. And the list of issues and events are not limited but also include electoral, census, land rights, education, investment and economic reform to guarantee the rights of all peoples. And in addressing such a wide array of issues and conflicts based on ethnic, political and religious backgrounds, President Thein Sein will need to be sincere, honest and most importantly conduct an all-inclusive political dialogue. In doing so, different ethnic groups, civil society, the government and the military (Tatmadaw) will all need to take part and be committed if there is to be peace and democratic transition in the country.

¹¹ Ethnic Groups Voice Concern over Census Classification System – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ethnic-groups-voice-concern-census-classification-system.html> (Irrawaddy) 10 January 2014

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

FULL TEXT OF PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar
President Office
Order No (1/2014)
2nd Waxing of Pyatho, 1375 ME
(2 January, 2014)**

With the aim of honouring the 66th Anniversary Independence Day, ensuring peace and stability of the State, the rule of law and national unity and making a focus on humanitarianism, the President pardoned inmates who were prosecuted regarding any offences they were convicted of before 3rd Waxing of Pyatho, 1375 ME (3 January, 2014) to enjoy pardon for their cases in accord with Section 204 (a) of the Constitution.

- (a) Those who were sentenced to death are to be commuted to life imprisonment (no limit on prison sentence of year).
- (b) Those serving life imprisonment (except those whose death sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment) and those with more than 40 years to serve have to serve 40 years in prison.
- (c) Inmates with jail terms 40 years and under have to be allowed a one-fourth reduction in their prison terms.

**Sd/Thein Sein
President
Republic of the Union of Myanmar¹²**

Appendix B: PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY THE JOINT-COMMITTEE FOR REVIEWING THE 2008 CONSTITUTION

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
Joint-committee for Reviewing the Constitution of Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Press Release (4/ 2013)
14th Waning of Nadaw, 1375 ME
(31 December, 2013)**

1. The Joint-committee for Reviewing the Constitution of Republic of the Union of Myanmar issued Press Release (2/2013) and invited legislative, executive and judicial pillars to send reviews and suggestions on the Constitution not later than 31 December, 2013.
2. According to the press release, the joint-committee received 28247 letters of suggestion till 4.30 pm on 31 December, 2013.
3. The following are letters of suggestion on respective chapters received from departments, associations, political parties and persons up to 31 December, 2013.
 - (a) 140,624 suggested points for Chapter (1)
 - (b) 100 suggested points for Chapter (2)
 - (c) 3369 suggested points for Chapter (3)
 - (d) 24398 suggested points for Chapter (4)
 - (e) 10783 suggested points for Chapter (5)

¹² Presidential Pardon –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-03-red.pdf> (NLM) 3 January 2014 (p. 1)

- (f) 469 suggested points for Chapter (6)
 - (g) 7242 suggested points for Chapter (7)
 - (h) 2077 suggested points for Chapter (8)
 - (i) 213 suggested points for Chapter (9)
 - (j) 43 suggested points for Chapter (10)
 - (k) 338 suggested points for Chapter (11)
 - (l) 105,233 suggested points for Chapter (12)
 - (m) 29 suggested points for Chapter (13)
 - (n) 59 suggested points for Chapter (14)
 - (o) 26 suggested points for Chapter (15)
 - (p) 81 suggested points for Table (1)
 - (q) 78 suggested points for Table (2)
 - (r) 11 suggested points for Table (3)
 - (s) 5 suggested points for Chapter (4)
 - (t) 26 suggested points for Table (5)
 - (u) 27906 special suggested point/letter for amending the Constitution
4. A total of 323,110 suggested points have been received.¹³

¹³ Joint committee for Reviewing the Constitution –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-01.pdf> (NLM) 1 January 2014 (p. 8)