

## POLITICAL MONITOR NO.5

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN MEETS LAOTIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT**

President U Thein Sein received a delegation led by President of the National Assembly of Lao People's Democratic Republic Madame Pany Yathotou in Naypyitaw on 25 January. At the meeting, discussions were focused on further cooperation in Mekong river security, sooner completion of Myanmar-Laos Friendship Bridge and strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries. Madame Pany and party also met with both Speakers of the Upper and Lower Houses and discussed promotion of cooperation and exchanges between the two parliaments as well as further cementing relations between the two countries.<sup>1</sup>

#### **BURMESE VICE-PRESIDENT NYAN TUN ATTENDS WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM**

A Burmese delegation led by Vice-President U Nyan Tun attended the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2013 held in Davos from 23-26 January. The Vice-President accompanied by senior government officials met with Klaus Schwab, founder and Executive Chairman and of the World Economic Forum on 25 January, and discussed the on-going democratic changes and matters relating to the World Economic Forum on East Asia meeting scheduled to be held in Burma later this year. The Burmese leader also called on Mr Didier Burkhalter, Vice-President of the Swiss Federal Council and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs on 25 January and discussed matters relating to friendship and cooperation between the two countries, development aid from Switzerland. While in Davos, Vice-President Nyan Tun met Prime Minister Mr Mark Rutte of the Netherlands and exchanged views on promotion of ties between the two countries. He also participated in a panel discussion entitled "Resilience in Diversity" with other leaders from Laos, Malaysia, the Philippine and Thailand. On the side-lines of the meeting, the Vice-President participated in the "Business Interaction Group on Burma" held at the Rinerhorn Club, Congress Centre. At the discussion, the Vice-President gave an opening remark on economic reforms being implemented in the country and responded to queries on foreign direct investment raised by the participants.<sup>2</sup>

#### **HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights**

##### **Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 8<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January. During the session six questions were raised and answered, and one bill discussed. The key issues included the following:

- Hluttaw representatives took part in the discussion on **the Employment and Capacity Building Bill** after which the Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Welfare U Maung Myint made clarifications.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> President U Thein Sein meets Laotian National Assembly President –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 January 2013 (p. 1)/  
Myanmar takes Laos as brother since establishment of diplomatic ties: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 January 2013 (p. 8)/  
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets Laotian National Assembly President –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 January 2013 (p. 10)

<sup>2</sup> Vice-President U Nyan Tun arrives back after attending World Economic Forum –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 January 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

<sup>3</sup> Brand new" licence covers longer term: Union Minister –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 January 2013 (p. 16)

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 9<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January. During the session discussions on the Contempt of Court Bill, re-appointment of retired civil servants and revising the existing rates of court fee and stamp fees were discussed. Key proposals and questions raised included the following:

- U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency (NDF) submitted a proposal urging **the Union government to consider the existing rates of court fee and stamp fee adjusted depending on Notification Nos. 122/2012 and 123/2012 of the Finance and Revenue Ministry on adjustment of court fee and stamp fee rates and Legislation Nos. 3 and 5 of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw which amend the court fee and tax fee laws.** In responding, the Deputy Minister for Finance and Revenue Dr Lin Aung replied that the rates were adjusted in line with the changing conditions and asked to document the proposal. The proposer agreed his suggestion and the Hluttaw decided to document the proposal;
- **The Pyithu Hluttaw passed the Contempt of Court Bill at today's session to ensure freedom of jurisdiction, and public trust in judicature.**<sup>4</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 10<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January. During the session six questions were raised and answered. Key issues included the following:

- U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency (NDF) submitted a **bill revoking the Electronic Communication Act**, saying that **some of the provisions go against the existing Constitution. He questioned the necessity of the act, pointing out the fundamental needs for free flow of information in modern age, and that parliament should reconsider whether to utilize modern technologies in democratization process or deter technological advancement. The session decided to document the proposal and to monitor and cooperate with the ministry concerned.**
- The session approved **the Bill Amending the Transfer of Property Act and the Custodian of Moveable Property Act (1945) forwarded by the Supreme Court of the Union.**<sup>5</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 11<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January. Key issues discussed included the following:

- Member of Bill Committee U Soe Yel submitted the **Central Bank of Myanmar Bill**;
- U Thein Tun Oo of Amarapura Constituency (USDP) asked **if students whose affiliation with Mandalay University of Medicines was terminated would be re-admitted to the university.** In replying to the question, the Deputy Health Minister Dr Win Myint said that **the dismissal conformed to the existing rules and regulations approved by sixth medicines seminar in 2013. The number of dismissed students rose as 2400 students were admitted in 2012 with the maximum gap of marks of 30 and there were problems in teaching medicines, he explained. There are now only 1200 students who were admitted, the deputy minister said. According to the rules and regulations, a student who failed MBBS (B) exam thrice and who did not complete the one-year term as house surgeon will face dismissal. MP U Thein Tun Oo of Amarapura Constituency (USDP) stated that he raised the question out of sympathy towards students and parents and regarded some dismissals as being unfair.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Contempt of Court Bill passed for freedom of jurisdiction and public trust in judicature – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 January 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>5</sup> Dy Minister proposes formulation of a legislation to facilitate e-Commerce – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 January 2013 (p. 9)

<sup>6</sup> Mandalay Medicines University's dismissal decision will not be overturned: Deputy Health Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-31.pdf> (NLM) 31 January 2013 (p. 16)

## HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

### Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 8<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> January. During the session the following issues were raised and answered:

- U Khet Htain Nan of Kachin State Constituency No.1 (UDPKS) urged the **Union government to adopt firm principles for building mutual understanding with KIO/KIA to bring about internal peace**. In responding to the debate on the issue by 13 MPs, Deputy Minister U Aung Thein of the President's Office stated that the **government would enter into political dialogue without ceasefire as demanded by KIO/KIA**;
- U Aung Kyi Nyunt of Magway Region Constituency No (4) (NLD) pointed out **the need to appoint a peacemaker either person or entity who is neutral and respected by both sides and has excellent negotiation skills to settle the argument between two parties who are standing on different grounds with different views, concluding that it would grease wheels for negotiation process. The session approved the proposal.**<sup>7</sup>

### Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 9<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January. During the session four questions raised and answered and nine proposals submitted.

- Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee Defence Services Personnel Representative Brig-Gen Kyaw Oo Lwin read **the report of the committee on population and housing census bill**;
- Dr Banya Aung Moe of Mon State Constituency No 7 (AMRDP) discussed the **important role of conducting census for the State.**<sup>8</sup>

### Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 10<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January. During the session three questions were answered, one bill submitted and one proposal discussed and approved. The key issues discussed included the following:

- U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency No. 6 (USDP) submitted a **proposal urging the government to implement the Rehabilitation and Modernization Project of Flood Protection Embankments, Drainages and Ancillary Structures for Ayeyawady Delta**. Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Khin Zaw replied that it is necessary to **draw the work plans to be implemented in Delta region as the national plan with the participation of experts at home and abroad, ministries concerned and the region government and seconded the proposal. The Hluttaw decided to approve the proposal**;
- Deputy Minister for Health Dr Win Myint submitted **the Bill Amending the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Law**. MP Dr Khin Maung Lay of Bago Region Constituency No. 6 (USDP) seconded the bill.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Manaw Land to resurrect memorable events –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 January 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>8</sup> Plan underway to sell mobile phones at cheaper price soon –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 January 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>9</sup> Work plans to be implemented in Delta region as national plan with participation of experts at home and abroad, ministries concerned, region government –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 January 2013 (p. 9)

### **Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 11<sup>th</sup> day meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> January. During the session three questions were answered, one bill submitted and one proposal discussed and approved. The key issues discussed included the following:

- Dr Myat Nyarna Soe from Yangon Region Constituency No (4) (NDF) submitted a proposal urging **the Union government to build information and public relations departments in respective townships to public information centers so that people can inquire the functions of government agencies.** In responding, the Deputy Minister for Information U Paik Htwe stated that **current workforce of township IPRDs could not take the responsibility of public information centers and there was no such legislation giving power to IPRDs to collect information and data from other departments. He suggested forming public information committee by administrative organs in townships and assigning staff officers of IPRD as member or secretary of the proposed committee. Currently, the deputy minister said, the township IPRDs can only publicize the gazettes and orders and instructions of the government and are not in a position to assume the responsibility of publicizing information for public.**<sup>10</sup>

### UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

### **KACHIN, GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATORS TO MEET IN WA TERRITORY**

It was reported that Government negotiators and representatives from the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) have agreed to hold talks in Wa-administered territory in northern Shan state according to USWA spokesperson Aung Myint. The UWSA tabled the offer on 24 January. On 19 January, the government sent a letter to the KIO asking to resume peace talks, but the group rejected the offer and insisted they negotiate with the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an umbrella group made up of 11 major of the country's ethnic armed groups including the KIO. Hla Maung Shwe said the UNFC is tipped to meet with the Union-level Peace Making Committee in Thailand this February.<sup>11</sup>

*(Editor's note : Both these reports have been superceded by events. The Government and the KIO met in Ruili, China, on 4 Feb 2013.)*

### **KNU LEADER CALLS FOR UNITY AND A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO END ETHNIC CIVIL WAR**

KNU President, General Mutu Say Poe, has called for continued ethnic Karen unity while paying respects to the Karen people in a speech marking the 64th anniversary of Karen Revolutionary Resistance Day. In his speech, the KNU President acknowledged the sacrifice made by the Karen people in their decades-long conflict with the Burma's military and warned that the struggle for ethnic rights and freedom in country had not finished, despite the signing of a ceasefire in 2011 with Burma's military-backed government. "The Karen people have not yet gained their demands with full guarantee, in spite of long resistance movement and great sacrifices." He said that although the KNU had entered ceasefire negotiations, the revolution was not yet over. "Dialogue and ceasefire do not mean surrender," he said, "The current ceasefire is an endeavour for reaching the stage of political dialogue. However, in the current situation, we are still within the context of revolutionary armed resistance. General Mutu Say Poe also stated that the Karen must find a lasting political solution to the conflict, by talking with Burma's military. "The KNU position is that as the conflict is a political problem, the best way to resolve it is through a meaningful face-to-face political dialogue. In

<sup>10</sup> IPRDs lack resources to serve as public information center: Deputy Information Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-31.pdf> (NLM) 31 January 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>11</sup> Kachin, government negotiators to meet in Wa territory – <http://www.dvb.no/news/kachin-govt-negotiators-to-meet-in-wa-territory/26090> (DVB) 30 January 2013

accordance with our policy of resolving the political problem politically and based on our experience in the resistance, we have agreed to preliminary ceasefire through recent rounds of dialogue.” But General Mutu Saw Poe warned that peace talks were still preliminary, “We still have not reached the stage of firm ceasefire.” Mutu Say Poe called for a united front of ethnic minorities in order to ensure that minority rights would be respected in future. “The cooperation and participation of the ethnic nationalities is vitally important for the acceptable resolution of the main political problem that has caused civil war in Burma/Myanmar.” “Currently, the Burmese/Myanmar government in power has made overtures to the ethnic nationality organizations to cease fire for holding talks, in order to establish peace in the country,” yet the ceasefire talks could not be seen as a stable solution until, “[A] code of conduct [is established] to be observed by the troops of both sides. “As we have not reached the stage of acceptable resolution of the political problem, peace cannot still be established.” In concluding, Mutu Say Poe encouraged the Karen people to continue their fight for their rights and freedoms, to work for unity and understanding among the Karen people.”<sup>12</sup>

### **GOV'T PEACE MEET – FAILS TO ANSWERS QUESTIONS ON CONFLICT OR DISPLACEMENT**

Civil society groups voiced their disappointment that the government ministers appointed to its Peace Committee failed to address many of the questions that representatives from 64 community-based-organizations brought to a meeting held at the Myanmar Peace Centre on 27 January. Nan Thandar Aung, a representative from the Karen Women Action Group (KWAG) who attended the meeting told local news media that when specific questions on the Kachin state conflict and returning process for Karen refugees, the government official failed to provide concrete answers. She also complained that the civil society groups at the meeting did not have enough time to discuss the issues – the government representatives gave only three minutes each to the group and only 20 groups out of 64 had the chance to pose questions.

The meeting was attended by over 90 representatives including; Ministers U Aung Min, U Soe Thein, U Khin Yi and representatives from 64 civil society groups. The government convened the meeting to discuss the country's peace building process and the repatriation of refugees and displaced people. The community representatives said that the government had shown a lack of transparency by failing to discuss repatriation issues related to sending back of Karen refugees from camps along the Thai-Burma border. Government ministers recently met with the United Nation High for Commissioner Refugees (UNHCR) and the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), but the community based groups claim that the government has not discussed the issues with refugees and civil society groups. This is the first time the government has held discussion between its 'Union Peace Making Committee' and the country's civil society groups, it is expected that there will be future discussions. It is a path the President, U Thein Sein, had set when he met with the country's civil society groups in January and sought their cooperation on the peace building process.<sup>13</sup>

### **FROM SHAN FORUM TO JOINT SHAN-KAYAH STATE CONFERENCE**

Shans who had held a highly successful forum in November 2012, are now moving forward to hold a Shan State conference in March 2013 and the event is expected to be joined by parties from Kayah State, according to Sai Lake, spokesperson for the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). “Shan and Kayah states have a long history of friendly coexistence and cooperation,” he said. “Parties there have also requested not to move ahead without them.”

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Revolutionary Day: KNU leader calls for unity and a political solution to end ethnic civil war – <http://karennews.org/2013/01/karen-revolutionary-day-knu-leader-calls-for-unity-and-a-political-solution-to-end-ethnic-civil-war.html/> (Karen News) 31 January 2013

<sup>13</sup> Gov't peace meet – Fails to answers questions on conflict or displacement – <http://karennews.org/2013/01/govts-peace-meet-fails-to-answers-questions-on-conflict-or-displacement.html/> (Karen News) 30 January 2013

Mongpai (also known as Moebye) and Faikhun (better known as Pekhon) in Shan State are made up of races of Kayah descent. Parties like Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) and Kayan National Party (KNP), in fact, are more active in Shan State than in Kayah. Other Kayah-based parties that have made the request included Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP), Karenni Nationalities Peoples Liberation Front (KNPLF), Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO) and Karenni Nationalities Peoples Development Party (KNPDP). (The KNPP is a splinter group from its mother movement that signed a ceasefire agreement with Naypyitaw on 7 March 2012)

At a meeting attended by 9 parties held in Lashio on 29 January, an agreement was reached to hold the conference in the first week of March later this year. A conference organizing committee composed of 3 members from SNLD and 1 each from 8 other parties have also been formed. The parties include:

- Danu Nationalities Democracy Party (DNDP)
- Inn National Development Party (INDP)
- Kayan National Party (KNP)
- Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)
- Kokang Democracy and Unity Party (KDUP)
- Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKDP)
- Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)
- Wa National Unity Party (WNUP)

The organizing committee is planning to make the conference an inclusive one, Sai Lake added. "We need to include remaining groups (in Shan State and Kayah State) in order to establish a common political stand," he said. The Shan-Kayah cooperation in 1960 had led to the interstate conference in 1961 that called for amendment to the 1947 "federal in form, unitary in substance" constitution. The two year gamble ended with the military takeover in 1962.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> From Shan forum to joint Shan-Kayah state conference – [http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5220:from-shan-forum-to-joint-shan-kayah-state-conference&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266](http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5220:from-shan-forum-to-joint-shan-kayah-state-conference&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266) (S.H.A.N.) 30 January 2013

## **ANALYSIS**

News that the government and KIO are planning to hold talks is welcome news. While details of the scheduled talks remain unclear, the desire to conduct talks in it-self should be seen as a positive step in the right direction. While foreign governments and organizations have expressed concerns, they have been unable to exert their influence in bringing both the government and KIA to the negotiating table. One possible option is for the inclusion of other ethnic groups and civil society organizations to become more involved in the peace process. It is evident that the lack of trust between the government and the KIO remains one of the biggest challenges in resolving the conflict. Recent calls by civil society organizations inside the country, and the offers by various organizations to act as mediators should be taken seriously if the government and the KIO are serious about building genuine peace.