
POLITICAL MONITOR NO.18

OFFICIAL MEDIA

TWENTY-THREE PRISONERS GRANTED AMNESTY

The Myanmar government on 17 May (Friday) released 23 prisoners under a Presidential amnesty. According to state-run media, the amnesty was made in view of ensuring peace and stability and lasting peace of the state, national reconciliation, and to enable those released to participate in the on-going political and nation-building process.¹

UNION PEACE-MAKING WORK COMMITTEE MEETS RESPONSIBLE PERSONS OF SSPP/SSA

Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-Making Work Committee U Thein Zaw held talks with a delegation from the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) led by Vice-Chairman U Sao Kei Taing in Tangyan on 11 May. The work committee vice-chairman stressed the importance of holding peace talks, calling for participation of all, based on constructive engagement for the sake of the Union and border regions and called on those present to explore every avenue for a compromise which is acceptable to all, upholding the compassion and desisting away from putting blames on each other. Thein Zaw also stated that cooperation with neighboring countries is in progress to promote mutual friendship and amity and plans are also underway for the enactment of a law to protect the rights of national races. The SSPP/SSA vice-chairman also expressed his desire to continue the peace talks in a frank and open manner. The two sides also discussed issues on cooperation in transportation, education, and health sectors, peaceful co-existence for an eternal peace and bilateral coordination between the two sides. After the meeting, the following joint-statement was released:-

- (1) Both sides are to be serious about, agreements made in state level and Union level peace talks.
- (2) Officials concerned of Tatmadaw and SSPP/SSA are to put in place troop movements and deployment of both sides.
- (3) To avoid unlawful acts that may cause public burdens.
- (4) In case of suspicions and problems, representatives of both sides are to meet as soon as possible to negotiate and resolve them transparently.²

GOVERNMENT PEACE NEGOTIATOR MEETS WA REPRESENTATIVES

The government's peace negotiating team and United Wa State Party (UWSP) held peace talks in Panghsan in Wa Special Region 2 on 10 May. At the meeting, UWSP Vice-Chair U Shaung Milian called for review of the constitution formulated in 2008 to be suited with the present time, demanding autonomy of "Wa" Region. He said "Wa" organization condemns resolving any problems through military means and voiced his concerns that it could harm regional stability. He also thanked the government for its efforts in promoting development of the "Wa" Region and stressed that it would continue to provide assistance in transportation, communication, education, health and social sectors. In responding, U Thein Zaw of the Union Peace-making said that he was to see that "Wa" locals observing the two Union-level agreements and urged the Wa leaders to work with the

¹ Twenty-three prisoners granted amnesty –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-18-red.pdf> (NLM) 18 May 2013

² Union Peace-Making Work Committee meets responsible persons of SSPP/SSA –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 May 2013 (p. 16)

government in achieving peace. The two sides also discussed regional development, socio-economic improvement and jobs creation in the region.³

UNION PEACE-MAKING WORK COMMITTEE MEETS SPECIAL REGION (4) PEACE AND UNITY COMMITTEE

Vice-Chair U Thein Zaw and members of the Union Peace-Making Work Committee and Chairman of the Special Region (4) – Mongla, Shan State (East) was held on 9 May. During the talks, the two sides discussed matters related to development of the Special Region and also for the establishment of mutual trust and understanding in achieving peace and stability as well elimination of narcotic drugs. U Thein Zaw also urged the leaders of the Special Region (4) to continue talks and discussions with the authorities in promoting peace and that the government is enacting laws to protect the interests of national races in the country.⁴

EU HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIAL ENVOY VISITS BURMA

EU Special Representative on Human Rights Mr Stavros Lambrindis on his recent visit to Burma met the country's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and discussed the on-going political developments and future cooperation between the EU and Burma/Myanmar. The EU delegation also held meetings with the Attorney-General, Deputy Speaker of the Lower House U Nanda Kyaw Swa and discussed a wide range of issues including promotion of human rights in Burma; the signing of international human rights declarations and reforming the legal system rights in the country.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

88 GENERATION STUDENTS HOLD TALKS WITH US, CHINA

The 88 Generation Student group recently held talks with U.S. and Chinese envoys to highlight the need to repeal a law that can throw former political prisoners back into jail and to bring about transparency in Chinese investments criticized over environmental and other concerns. The Group held a meeting 13 May (Monday) with U.S. Ambassador Derek Mitchell to lobby for support for rapid political reforms and also discussed strengthening of U.S support for community-based groups in Burma. In a separate meeting the with Chinese Ambassador Yang Houlan, the 88 Student's Group urged for openness regarding Chinese backed projects in Burma especially the projects that concern environmental issues and natural resources. In a statement after his meeting with the 88 Generation Students' Group, Yang said Beijing wants to strengthen people-to-people exchanges with Burma as a way of improving ties and to push forward mutual beneficial cooperation between the two countries.⁶

UNLAWFUL ASSOCIATION LAW HINDERING PEACE PROCESS: SHAN'S RCSS

The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) is urging the government to rescind a provision of a law related to unlawful association so that ethnic groups in the area can more effectively carry out a political dialogue. RCSS spokesman Maj Sai Lao Hseng said RCSS and Shan State Army-South (SSA-

³ Union Peace-making Work Committee meets responsible persons of UWSP –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-13.pdf> (NLM) 13 May 2013 (p.8)

⁴ Union Peace-Making Work Committee meets Special Region (4) Peace and Unity Committee –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 May 2013 (p.9)

⁵ Union FM receives EU special rep –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 May 2013 (p.16)/
Myanmar to cooperate with EU and Britain in legal affairs –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 May 2013 (p.16)/
Dy Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives EU special rep –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-05-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 May 2013 (p.8)

⁶ 88 Generation Students hold talks with US, China –
<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/burma/88-generation-students-05142013135841.html> (RFA) 14 May 2013

South) representatives raised the issue of Section 17/1 of the Unlawful Association Act, which allows for the arrest of anyone deemed a participant or linked to “unlawful groups,” during a recent meeting with the government’s chief negotiator U Aung Min. Section 17/1’s removal was among a list of points first brought up at a meeting between government peace negotiators and the SSA-South in May of last year in Kengtung Township. That meeting saw the signing of an ostensible ceasefire agreement. “For political talks, we also need to meet with the public,” Sai Lao Hseng said. “But the political parties are afraid to even communicate with us [due to the law]. In responding, U Aung Min said that the matter would be considered when cease-fires can be reached at the nation-level.⁷

KNU VOWS TO SEEK GENUINE FEDERALISM

The Karen National Union (KNU) will seek out genuine federalism without retrospection although so far only a ceasefire agreement has been reached between the government and the KNU, a central committee member of the KNU headquarters Saw Hla Tun said on May 14. He said “Now we’ve agreed to ceasefire, we will discuss with the government at the union level to achieve lasting peace. I think the discussion will be in this month although I’m not sure.” The KNU welcomes more negotiations for the sake of peace, expecting the authentic peace which is stronger than ever before, according to the in charge of the KNU new generation affairs Saw Thamain Tun. “If the government and the military won’t backtrack from the process, we will not, either. We really want peace and we need to build trust so as to achieve peace,” said Saw Thamain Tun. A ceremony to brief locals on the details of the talks with the government and the KNU was held in Myattharkon Village, Karen State on May 13 and 14 and attended by officials and representatives from the KNU, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), KNU Brigade-2 and the Thantaung special zone group.⁸

UK PLEDGES £4.4 MILLION FOR RAKHINE IDPS

Britain has pledged a £4.4 million (US\$6.7 million) humanitarian aid package to help internally displaced people (IDPs) in Rakhine State in western Burma. Alan Duncan, the U.K. Minister of State for International Development said, “Thousands of people displaced by violence in Rakhine State are currently extremely vulnerable. With the first tropical storm of the cyclone season due to hit the area this week, it is imperative that we respond to the unfolding humanitarian crisis.” He also added that the British support will provide the much needed assistance and protection to the displaced and more importantly the plight of the people in Rakhine State must not be ignored. The Minister also urged the Burmese government and international community to “step up to the plate”. The aid package will provide 80,000 people with access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities; treatment for malnourished children; and, hygiene kits for 40,000 people. The U.K. has previously donated more than £2 million (\$3 million) in humanitarian aid since violence broke out in the state last year leaving an estimated 140,000 IDPs across 89 locations camps and makeshift villages.⁹

ANALYSIS

Recent clashes in the Shan State between government forces and several of the cease-fire groups has once again put the peace process in the country under scrutiny and casted doubts on its future. The government as always has responded by dispatching its negotiators to mend fences and restore normalcy with the ethnic groups. The talks helped in ending the latest skirmishes between Burmese forces and the armed groups in the Shan State. However, it cannot be assumed that the truce will

⁷ Unlawful Association Law Hindering Peace Process: Shan’s RCSS – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/34835> (Irrawaddy) 17 May 2013

⁸ KNU vows to seek genuine federalism – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/3509-knu-vows-to-seek-genuine-federalism> (Eleven News Media) 16 May 2013

⁹ UK pledges £4.4 million for Rakhine IDPs – <http://mizzima.com/news/development/9405-uk-pledges-p44-million-for-rakhine-idps.html> (Mizzima) 16 May 2013

lead to permanent peace. Intrusions by government forces and ethnic armed groups alike were the cause of the recent clashes and points to the need to implement cease-fire monitoring. Many of the 13 cease-fire agreements signed by the government provide for cease-fire monitoring but none have been implemented. Given that the on-going ethnic conflicts have existed for decades, without cease-fire monitoring, and a political dialogue, peace cannot be achieved in Burma. Therefore the government needs to take the initiative to implement cease-fire monitoring and begin a political dialogue with all stakeholders including the ethnic armed groups.