

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 37

OFFICIAL MEDIA

INITIAL PEACE AGREEMENT INKED BETWEEN SHAN STATE GOVERNMENT PEACE GROUP AND RCCS/SSA

A signing ceremony was held in the Shan State capital Taunggyi between representatives from the Shan State government and the RCSS/SSA (The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS/Shan State Army) with the view to building peace in the region. Those present included the leader of the Union level peace group Union Minister for Rail Transportation U Aung Min, Union Minister for Electric Power No.2 U Khin Maung Soe, Shan State Chief Minister U Sao Aung Myat, State Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Aung Thu, General Staff Officer (Grade-1) of Triangle Region Command Lt-Col Zaw Tun Myint, State Advocate General U Maung Maung and officials and U Sai Lu of RCSS/SSA peace group and leading members of the Shan State Army.¹

BURMA'S DEFENCE SERVICES CHIEF VISITS CHINA

A high-level military delegation led by the Commander-in-Chief of Burma's armed forces Gen Min Aung Hlaing paid a goodwill visit to China from 27 November to 2 December 2011 at the invitation of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).² The PLA Chief of General Staff General Chen Bingde greeted the visiting Burmese Army Chief and exchanged views on promoting friendship and cooperation between the two armies and well as regional security and threats and signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation.³ General Min Aung Hlaing also met Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission and Vice-President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping on 28 November and discussed matters related to improvement of Burma-China mutual relations, as well as national reconciliation, peace and stability and developments in Burma.⁴

General Min Hlaing also visited state-owned enterprises in Beijing and Chengdu, including Poly Company and ALIT (Aerospace Long-March International Trade Co Ltd);⁵ AVIC Chengdu Aircraft Industry (Group) Co Ltd and Xi Nan Electronic Research Department in Chengdu.⁶ The Burmese Defence Chief also toured an air division base in Hangzhou and a local naval base in Shanghai and inspected the Naval Vessel No.513.⁷

JAPAN AND BURMA HOLD ODA POLICY CONSULTATION MEETING

The Japan-Myanmar Official Development Assistance (ODA) Policy Consultation Meeting was held on 28 November in Nay Pyi Taw. The Japanese delegation was represented by Mr. Kimihiro Ishikane, Deputy Director-General, South-East & South-West Asian Affairs Department of the Japanese

¹ Initial peace agreement inked between State level peace group and RCSS/SSA -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 December 2011 (p. 16)

² Myanmar Tatmadaw delegation led by Commander-in Chief General Min Aung Hlaing arrives in Beijing -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-11-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 November 2011 (p. 9)

³ Chief of PLA General Staff General Chen Bingde extends warm welcome to Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-11-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 November 2011 (p. 16)

⁴ Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing meets Chinese Vice-President -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-11-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 November 2011 (p. 16)

⁵ Commander-in-Chief General Min Aung Hlaing visits Poly and Alit companies -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-11-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 November 2011 (p. 9)

⁶ C-in-C General Min Aung Hlaing leaves for Chengdu on his China visit -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 7) /

General Min Aung Hlaing visits Si Wei factory under Xi Nan electronic research department -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 December 2011 (p. 7)

⁷ Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services General Min Aung Hlaing visits local air division in Hangzhou, PRC -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 6)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by officials from relevant ministries. The Burmese side was led by Daw Myat Myat Soe, Director-General of Foreign Economic Relations Department of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development as well as officials from relevant ministries. At the meeting, discussions were held on the development policies of the new Burmese administration, as well as on Japan's assistance policies on ODA for sustainable economic development of Burma, including the formulation of projects that can be implemented under Japan's current economic cooperation policy towards Burma. Both countries agreed to build upon the meeting to further enhance coordination in the future. The Japanese side expressed that it is important for Burma to become a democratic nation based on a market economy and social stability, and would therefore assist in implementing economic cooperation while watching for improvements in democratization and the human rights situation.⁸

BANGLADESH PRIME MINISTER VISITS BURMA

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrived in Nay Pyi Taw on 5 December for a three-day official visit to Burma, the first by a Bangladesh leader in eight years.⁹ During her stay, Sheikh Hasina met President U Thein Sein¹⁰ and senior cabinet ministers¹¹, and also witnessed the signing of several bilateral cooperation agreements, which were announced in a joint statement¹². During the official talks, leaders of the two countries expressed their desire to promote bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and investment as well as collaborating in the areas of regional organisations such as BIMST-EC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), ASEAN, ARF and the UN.¹³ On the sidelines of the visit, Prime Minister Hasina attended a foundation stone laying ceremony for the construction of the Bangladeshi embassy in Burma's new capital Nay Pyi Taw.¹⁴

Unofficial Media

The two sides also discussed the long-standing issue of the Rohingya refugees and the Burmese President gave assurances to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to take back the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh after verification by Burmese authorities.¹⁵

⁸ ODA policy consultation meeting held -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-06.pdf> (NLM) 6 November 2011 (p. 2)

⁹ Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrives on goodwill visit to Myanmar -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-06.pdf> (NLM) 6 December 2011 (p. 1)

¹⁰ President U Thein Sein meets Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and party -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-07-op50-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 December 2011 (p. 16 & 10) /

Both countries are collaborating in regional and international issues by supporting each other (President U Thein Sein)/The relations between two countries which have similar geographical conditions and history are improving (Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina) -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-07-op50-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 December 2011 (p.16 & 9)

¹¹ Union Foreign Minister calls on Bangladeshi Prime Minister -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-06.pdf> (NLM) 6 December 2011 (p. 9)

¹² (Joint Statement between Burma & Bangladesh) Bangladesh and Myanmar enter into new phase in bilateral relations with pragmatic and practical approach based on sovereignty, equality, friendship, trust and understanding for mutual benefit and collective prosperity of the region-

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 December 2011 (p. 7)

¹³ Both countries are collaborating in regional and international issues by supporting each other (President U Thein Sein)/The relations between two countries which have similar geographical conditions and history are improving (Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina) -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-07-op50-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 December 2011 (p.16 & 9)

¹⁴ Foundation stone erected for construction of Bangladeshi Embassy in Nay Pyi Taw -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-07-op50-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 December 2011 (p.10)

¹⁵ Burma gives assurance to repatriate Rohingya refugees -

http://www.kaladanpress.org/v3/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3473:burma-gives-assurance-to-repatriate-rohingya-refugees&catid=143:december-2011&Itemid=2 (Kaladan) 10 December 2011

BELARUSIAN PM VISITS BURMA

Belarusian Prime Minister Dr. Mikhail V. Myasnikovich visited Burma from 1-3 December on an official visit, where he held talks with Burmese President U Thein Sein, and met the speakers of both Houses of the Parliament, U Khin Aung Myint and U Shwe Mann, as well as Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin in Nay Pyi Taw.¹⁶ According to a joint statement, a detailed and constructive exchange of opinions on the current status and prospect for development of bilateral relations took place, and regional and international issues of mutual concern were discussed during the meetings. The two countries also signed a series of accords including a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of friendship and cooperation between Burma and Belarus, as well as five agreements on 1) trade and economic cooperation, 2) visa exemption for holders of diplomatic and official passports, 3) agricultural cooperation, 4) education cooperation and 5) cooperation between chambers of commerce and industry of the two countries.¹⁷ The first Myanmar-Belarus Business Forum was also held in Nay Pyi Taw on 3 December, where Burma's Vice-President Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo and Prime Minister Myasnikovich both delivered addresses at the opening ceremony.¹⁸

In January 2011, Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint visited Belarus, during which the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of bilateral consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs. During the talks, U Maung Myint and his counterpart, Sergei Aleinik discussed the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation in international fora as well as strengthening cooperation in the areas of agriculture, trade, industry and other economic activities.¹⁹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

SUU KYI MEETS VATICAN ENVOY

Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi met with the Vatican's envoy Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino who was visiting Burma to attend the celebrations marking the centenary of St Mary's Cathedral in Yangon on 8 December. During the meeting, they underscored the importance of and called for national conciliation to include all in society no matter their ethnic or religious background. Speaking ahead of the ceremony, the Archbishop of Yangon, Monsignor Charles Maung Bo, said "It will be an important moment for the Christian community: for its history and faith, but

¹⁶ Belarusian Prime Minister and wife arrive in Nay Pyi Taw - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 December 2011 (p. 16) / President U Thein Sein receives Belarusian Prime Minister Dr. Mikhail V. Myasnikovich and party - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 16 & 9) / President U Thein Sein meets Belarusian Prime Minister Dr. Mikhail V. Myasnikovich and party - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 1 & 8) / Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker meets Belarusian Prime Minister and party - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 2) / Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann receives Belarusian Prime Minister Dr. Mikhail V. Myasnikovich - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 December 2011 (p. 6)

¹⁷ MoU on establishment of friendship and cooperation between Myanmar and Belarus signed - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 December 2011 (p. 16) / Myanmar ties Belarus with bilateral agreements - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 December 2011 (p. 8 & 9)

¹⁸ Bilateral cooperation will further develop between Myanmar and Belarus at the end of Belarusian PM's visit (Vice-President Thiha Thura U Tin Aung Myint Oo)/ Potential of growth of trade turnover between our countries can reach over the next few years is fifty times as high (Belarusian Prime Minister Dr. Mikhail V. Myasnikovich) - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-12-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 December 2011 (p. 1 & 8)

¹⁹ Belarusian, Burmese foreign ministries sign memorandum of understanding - <http://news.belta.by/en/news/politics?id=606304> (BelTA) 13 January 2011 / Myanmar, Belarus to promote cooperation - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2011 (p. 2)

also for its future, for the role Christians wish to play in a free and democratic country." Also in attendance at the celebration was an official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, who read out a letter from the minister calling on Christians to "involve themselves in the country's development as much they can" as they are also good citizens of Burma.²⁰

ALD WILL NOT REGISTER UNTIL POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE FREE

The Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), the Arakanese (Rakhine) political party which received the third-highest votes in Burma's 1990 elections, will not register again until all political prisoners are released from jails across the country according to U Aye Thar Aung, a senior member of the party. U Aye Thar Aung said that many political prisoners remained in jail and the party would only consider party registration when all political prisoners were freed. In meeting on 10 October attended by ALD members from 17 townships in the Arakan (Rakhine) State, party members showed their eagerness to re-register the party. However, he added that is necessary for the ALD to register in order to continue its political activities and it will do its best to serve Rakhine national interests.²¹

CHIN NATIONAL PARTY WELCOMES PEACE TALK PROCESS BETWEEN CHIN NATIONAL FRONT AND CHIN STATE GOVERNMENT

The Chin National Party (CNP) has welcomed peace talks between the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Chin State government scheduled to be held in January 2012 in the Chin State capital Hakha. A meeting of the central committee of CNP was held on 3 and 4 December, which welcomed the CNF's decision to enter negotiations with the state level peace committee. Following negotiations between the Burmese government and other ethnic armed groups (including the Chin National Front (CNF)) on 19 November, both sides initially agreed to meet in Hakha. The CNP was formed in 2010 and contested the Burmese general elections in Chin state and won nine constituencies.²²

ANALYSIS

The visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheik Hasina has been welcomed by both sides, since relations between the two countries have been shadowed by the unresolved issue of the Rohingya refugees. The visit has also provided both governments an opportunity to further enhance their bilateral relations and as well as cooperation in sectors of mutual interest. Similarly, the signing of several agreements on cooperation between Burma and Belarus during the Belarusian Prime Minister's visit and can be seen as Nay Pyi Taw's expansion of ties beyond its immediate borders. While foreign dignitaries have been busy shuttling to Nay Pyi Taw, Burma on its part has also been engaged in dispatching its own emissaries abroad.

General Min Aung Hlaing's visit to China will have been aimed at providing reassurances to its northern neighbour and also to restore the special "Phaukphaw" relationship between the two countries after the President's decision on the Myitsone dam, which jeopardized the existing cordial relations. Furthermore, Burma's rapprochement with Washington has put Beijing in an awkward dilemma and has also given the Nay Pyi Taw government an alternative in which to balance its relationship with China. While attempting to promote change, Burma has opted to follow a dual-track policy - one of maintaining relations with China and the other of building trust with the United States. While relations with the US may allow Burma to shift its dependence on China, the harsh reality is that its geographic location (as well as demographics) will prove to be crucial in dealing with the two superpowers. How Burma balances this political dimension will surely be a test and challenge for President U Thein Sein during his term of office.

²⁰ Suu Kyi meets papal envoy in church -

<http://www.ucanews.com/2011/12/08/suu-kyi-meets-papal-envoy-in-church/> (ucanews) 8 December 2011

²¹ ALD will not register until political prisoners are free -

<http://www.narinjara.com/details.asp?id=3190> (Narinjara) 6 December 2011

²² CNP welcomes peace talk process between CNF and state government -

<http://khonumthung.org/?p=544> (Khonumthung News) 6 December 2011