

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 20

OFFICIAL MEDIA

BURMA & UN SIGN LANDMARK PLAN OF ACTION TO RELEASE CHILDREN FROM ARMED FORCES / UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT

President Thein Sein received the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict of the UN Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 June and discussed cooperation between Burma and the UN, especially regarding the successful implementation of the prevention against recruitment of minors, as well as drawing up future work programmes to be implemented in the ethnic regions inside Burma. The Special Representative also attended a ceremony to sign the Plan of Action for the Prevention against Recruitment of Minors between the Burmese government and the United Nations. The new plan of action sets out concrete and time-bound activities to ensure the separation of children from the Burmese armed forces and to prevent further recruitment and use of underage children. The plan was signed by Major General Ngwe Thein (Director of the Directorate of Military Strength, Ministry of Defence) and Major General Tin Maung Win (Vice Adjutant General, Myanmar armed forces) on behalf of the government and the UN Resident Coordinator Ashok Nigam and UNICEF Representative Ramesh Shrestha.¹

LAO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT

Laotian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Thongloun Sisoulith met President Thein Sein on 27 June in Nay Pyi Taw, where they exchanged views on further strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries and matters of mutual interest. FM Sisoulith also met Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and discussed bilateral and regional issues as well as the on-going political developments in Burma.²

BURMESE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT TO LAOS & VIETNAM

Upper House Speaker U Khin Aung Myint led a parliamentary delegation on official visits to the Lao People's Republic from 16-20 June and Vietnam from 20-23 June.

In Vientiane, the delegation met Laotian leaders including President Choummaly Sayasone and Chair of the National Assembly Pany Yththotous, where they agreed for greater cooperation and exchanges of information between the two governments, covering training, legislation, socio-economic development, promotion and management as well as expanding cooperation within the ASEAN Framework.³

¹ President U Thein Sein receives Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict of the UNSG – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2012 (p. 1) / Plan of Action for Prevention against Recruitment of Minors signed – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2012 (p. 16) / Myanmar, UN sign agreement on ending recruitment of children in armed forces – http://www.unicef.org/media/media_65180.html (UNICEF Press Centre) 27 June 2012

² President U Thein Sein receives Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2012 (p. 1) / Union Foreign Affairs Minister receives Laotian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2012 (p. 8)

³ Myanmar delegation led by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint arrives in Vientiane, Laos PDR – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2012 (p. 8) / Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint calls on Laotian President – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2012 (p. 16) / Closer cooperation brings more fruitful results both to governments and parliaments of Laos and Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2012 (p. 16 & 9)

At the invitation Chairman of the Vietnam National Assembly Nguyen Sinh Hung, the delegation arrived in Hanoi as part of their 4-day official visit, where they held talks with Chairman Hung, as well as with President Truong Tan Sang and Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. During the official talks, both sides agreed to increase the exchange of high-level visits, to establish friendship parliamentarians groups, to strengthen legislative cooperation, to support each other at multilateral forums so as to increase political confidence and mutual understanding, and to help boost bilateral cooperation in economics trade, investment and other areas. The Speaker echoed the Vietnamese leaders' view that the two legislatures needed to increase cooperation and to make relations between the two countries more efficient and substantial.⁴

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

SSA SENDS PROTEST LETTERS AFTER 24TH CLASH

The Shan State Army (SSA) 'South' has sent a protest letter to the Deputy Commander of the Burmese Army General Soe Win, following a clash which took place in Laikha, Shan State South, on Wednesday, 27 June. According to the letter, the latest incident occurred when an SSA patrol was attacked by the government forces from Infantry Battalion 64, based in Laikha, near Mark Khi Nu Mountain, Wan Yerng tract, Laikha Township. The clash marks the 24th military confrontation between the two sides since the ceasefire agreement was signed on 2 December 2011, and the 7th since General Soe Win first attended the negotiations on 19 May. The letter (dated 28 June 2012 and signed by the SSA's chief liaison officer Brig-Gen Sai Lu) said that "The clashes are taking a terrible toll on the trust-building process." So far, no response has been received from the authorities.

The previous 6 clashes that took place were:

1. 23 May 2012 Pongpakhem, Mongton Township, where the Burma Army was "in search of a deserter"
2. 2 June 2012 SSA unit assigned to jointly conduct survey with the Burma Army in Monghta shelled by the Burma Army
3. 16 June 2012 Infantry Battalions (IBs) 225 and 65 attack SSA base in Pongpakhem, Mongton Township
4. 17 June 2012 Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 515 attacks SSA base in Ook Look, Namhsan Township
5. 19 June 2012 IB 249 patrol ran into SSA patrol near Na Lawn village, Pang Poi tract, Mongkeung Township, due to non-advance notification as agreed earlier
6. 19 June 2012 LIB 575 column attacking SSA at Hsaikhao, Kunhing Township⁵

⁴ Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint and party visit Vietnam – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 June 2012 (p. 8) / Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker meets Vietnamese President, Communist Party Secretary-General – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 June 2012 (p. 1) / Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint meets Chairman of Vietnamese National Assembly – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 June 2012 (p. 1) / Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw U Khin Aung Myint arrives back from Lao PDR, Vietnam – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-06-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 June 2012 (p. 16)

⁵ SSA sends protest letter after 24th clash – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4761:ssa-sends-protest-letter-after-24th-clash&catid=86:war&Itemid=284 (Shan Herald) 29 June 2012

ETHNIC PARTIES TO REACH OUT TO ARMED GROUPS

Six major ethnic minority political parties that competed in the 2010 elections are planning to meet with armed groups to assist the government's on-going peace process. The parties under an alliance known as the National Brotherhood Forum (NBF) include the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), the Rakhine [Arakan] Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), the All-Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), the Chin Progressive Party (CPP), the Phalon-Sawaw [Karen] Democratic Party (PSDP) and the Kayan [Karenni] National Party (KNP). The newly formed group will meet with the armed groups from their respective ethnicities in August said SNDP General Secretary Sai Hla Kyaw. He added that the alliance will hold separate meetings and then combine their findings with the aim of finding a solution - the SNDP will meet with the Shan State Army-South and North while the AMRDP will meet with the New Mon State Party and the CPP will hold talks with the Chin National Front. As there is currently no political party representing the Kachin in the forum, the group would reach out to the Kachin Independence Organisation through NGOs.⁶

ARAKANES PEACE GROUPS DEMAND REORGANIZATION AS BORDER GUARDS

Arakanese peace groups in the border township of Maungdaw in Arakan State have put up a proposal to the regional government to reorganize them to serve as border-guard force similar to those of other ethnic peace groups. A faction of the Arakan Army (AA) and the Burmese Communist Party (Arakan) that surrendered to the Burmese military regime for what was called an "exchange arms for peace" in 2001 and 1997 respectively, recently made the demand to the Minister of Security and Border Affairs of Arakan State Colonel Htin Lin that they be reorganized as border-guard forces. According to a leader of the peace groups who spoke on condition of anonymity "It will not be possible for us to continue to live in this border area if there are not sufficient security forces. The current reinforced security forces will go back to their barracks after completing their mission here. We have to ensure our own security by ourselves. So, we have demanded the regional government reorganize us as the border-guard force like in other ethnic regions." The government has yet to respond, however, to the proposal. The local ethnic residents in the border areas have also indicated that they are willing to serve as the peoples' militias to help guard their areas jointly with the border security forces. An Arakanese legislator also said the issue of forming border-guard forces for the security of border areas in Arakan State will likely be one of the top agendas that will be discussed in the coming regional parliamentary session.⁷

GOV'T FORMULATES ROHINGYA REPATRIATION PLAN: MINISTER

Immigration and Population Minister Khin Yi has said that the government has promulgated a policy aimed at repatriating Rohingya refugees who recently fled the violence in western Burma. "Regarding the Bengalis who left across the border, we have policies to accept them back," said Khin Yi, referring to the Rohingya as Bengalis. "Basically, they should [be able to prove] that they really left from Burma and that they are willing to come back. For children, they should be able to prove that both their parents went [to Bangladesh] from Burma. We are ready to repatriate anyone who meets these requirements." The minister said the deal had been discussed with the Bangladeshi government. The year 1824 when the British conquered large swathes of western Burma including present day Arakan state often serves as a demarcation date in the debate concerning who is native to the area.⁸

⁶ Ethnic parties to reach out to armed groups –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/ethnic-parties-to-reach-out-to-armed-groups/22702> (DVB) 29 June 2012

⁷ Arakanese peace groups demand reorganization as border-guards –

<http://www.narinjara.com/main/index.php/arakanese-peace-groups-demand-reorganization-as-border-guards/>

(Narinjara) 29 June 2012

⁸ Gov't formulates Rohingya repatriation plan: minister –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/gov%E2%80%99t-formulates-rohingya-repatriation-plan-minister/22706> (DVB) 29 June 2012

78 DEAD IN SECTARIAN VIOLENCE: GOV'T FIGURES

A total of 78 people were killed in the recent sectarian violence in Burma's Rakhine State from 28 May to 24 June, according to government figures released on 26 June. The widespread killings grew out of revenge killings in the murder and rape of a Buddhist woman by three Muslim men on 28 May. A total of 3,158 residential and business structures were destroyed by arson. The violent rampages forced Buddhist and Muslims to seek safety in temples, mosques, schools and government facilities. In the post-violence period, a total of 37 refugee camps were established for a total of 31,884 refugees, according to official statistics. Other sources say as many as 90,000 people may be in need of aid or assistance, including food, shelter and medicine. Meanwhile, relief aid and donations were pouring into the state. United Nations agencies and international nongovernmental organizations were setting up aid programs for the refugees in the riot-hit state. The U.N. said it foresees a 3-month relief effort in the area. During the week of this Political Monitor, nearly 1,000 displaced people were sent back to their respective villages in Maungtaw Township by the local government after it claimed the restoration of peace and stability to the area. Many refugees say they are still afraid of violence in the area. A declaration of emergency in the state and the imposition of curfew in six townships including Maungtaw and the capital Sittway have been in force since 10 June.⁹

GOVERNMENT AND KNU REINFORCE PEACE AGREEMENT

The Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese government held further peace talks in the Thai border town of Mae Sot on 26 June. The two sides met to discuss and reinforce the agreements they made in earlier meetings. The 6-member KNU delegation was led by General Secretary Naw Zipporah Sein and the 9-member government team was led by Railway Minister U Aung Min. The KNU's Sein said that she believed such meetings are important, in that they increase understanding between both sides and serve to increase confidence regarding each side's intentions. The government's chief negotiator U Aung Min said that local villagers could submit and discuss their difficulties through locally established liaison offices. On 6 April 2012, the KNU peace-talks delegation met and signed a 13-point peace agreement in Rangoon. According to sources close to KNU, there was no discussion about military issues during the meeting and no concrete outcome.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

The sectarian violence may have temporarily ceased, but finding a long-term solution to address the issue remains uncertain and the situation on the ground is fragile. The demand by several groups within Rakhine State to be formed into border guard forces is of concern. While the demands may have validity, the notion of various factions and groups taking up arms in self-defence may lead to more tensions in the region.

News of recent clashes between government forces and the Shan State Army (SSA) – South are also a cause for concern for the on-going national reconciliation process. While the federal government is holding peace talks with the various ethnic armed groups, it appears that the President's orders to cease fighting may have fallen on deaf ears. While some say that the orders have failed to reach the front-lines, others say that some elements within the government opposed to reforms are attempting to derail the democratic changes taking place by stoking the fires. Whatever the case, the government needs to urgently address the situation if it wants to end decades of fighting. While it did not produce any decisive out-come, the recent meeting between the government's peace team and the Karen National Union (KNU) has been a tool to aid in capacity- and trust-building. While more of such meetings are needed to bridge the distrust, continued clashes will only erode confidence in the Government's sincerity and ability to deliver results.

⁹ 78 dead in sectarian violence: gov't figures –

<http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/7400-78-burmese-dead-in-sectarian-violence-govt-figures.html> (Mizzima) 27 June 2012

¹⁰ Government and KNU reinforce peace agreement –

<http://karennews.org/2012/06/government-and-knu-reinforce-peace-agreement.html/> (Karen News) 27 June 2012