

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.20

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN STARTS OFFICIAL EUROPEAN VISIT

President Thein Sein left Nay Pyi Taw on 1 September on an official European visit to Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The President was accompanied by Union Ministers U Wunna Maung Lwin, U Ye Htut, U Soe Thane, U Ohn Myint, U Nyan Tun Aung and U Khin Maung Soe, deputy ministers Dr. Win Myint and U Than Swe and other officials.

On the first leg of his trip, he was welcomed by German Chancellor Merkel on 3 September in Berlin and discussed with her several topics including: political, economic and administrative reforms, rural development, poverty reduction, electricity generation, infrastructure development, the development of small and medium enterprises, the development of vocational education, the development of agriculture and livestock breeding, prospects for cooperation in education sector, media development, press freedom and ethics, state constitution and elections, peace, stability and development of Rakhine State and ASEAN and regional relations. In addition, the President met German President Joachim Gauck and as well as Lower House Speaker Norbert Lammert in Berlin on 4 September. He also held meetings with the Chairman of Deutsche Bank, the German Asia Pacific Business Organization (OAV) and the Executive Director of German Railways (DB BAHN) and discussed Myanmar's democratic reform process, bilateral cooperation in rail transportation, foodstuff production, promotion of tourism industry as well as environmental conservation.¹

DEPUTY FM EXCHANGES VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION AND SECURITY ISSUES WITH BANGLADESHI OFFICIALS

A delegation led by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Thant Kyaw attended the 8th Myanmar-Bangladesh Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) held in Dhaka on 28 August. They discussed further strengthening the existing friendly relations and immigration issues, border management, security issues, cooperation in energy, trade and commerce, culture and tourism, agriculture, livestock and fisheries and defence cooperation sectors. Deputy Minister Thant Kyaw also met with Minister for Foreign Affairs Abdul Hassan Mahmood Ali and State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan, as well as advisors at the Prime Minister's Office and discussed promoting of bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries.²

VICE PRESIDENT AND DIPLOMATS VISIT RELIEF CAMPS IN RAKHINE STATE

Chairman of the Central Committee for Stability and Development Vice President Sai Mauk Kham accompanied by Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Ambassadors and officials from INGOs visited the Emergency Coordination Centre in Sittwe on 4 September. They met officials from 23 UN and

¹ President U Thein Sein starts official visits to three European countries –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/2/09/2014/id-13011> (NLM) 2 September 2014 (p. 1)/
Myanmar President pays friendly visit to Germany –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/3/09/2014/id-13046> (NLM) 3 September 2014 (p. 1)
Myanmar wants Germany to prioritize its investment not necessarily in extractive industry alone, but primarily in manufacturing sector which encourage job opportunities for local people - *President Thein Sein*
Germany supports all-inclusive peace-building efforts and promised to encourage development and freedom in Myanmar - *Chancellor Angela Merkel* –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/4/09/2014/id-13097> (NLM) 4 September 2014 (p. 1 & 3)/
President U Thein Sein meets German President Mr Joachim Gauck –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/5/09/2014/id-13130> (NLM) 5 September 2014 (p. 1)

² Deputy FM exchanges views on immigration and security issues with Bangladeshi officials –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/2/09/2014/id-13011> (NLM) 2 September 2014 (p. 2)

international organizations and were briefed on the work being implemented by the emergency coordination committee. In his address, Vice President Mauk Kham thanked the UN agencies and INGOs in Rakhine State on behalf of the government and said that all displaced people are currently safe in relief camps due to the efforts of the government and the assistance of UN agencies and the international community.³

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KNU SUSPENDS MEMBERSHIP OF ETHNIC ALLIANCE

After walking out on peace talks on 31 August, the Karen National Union (KNU) has suspended its membership with the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and said in a statement that they would not be sending a representative to the next summit. KNU leaders have long held high profile positions within the coalition of ethnic armed organisations, which invited political parties and civil society groups to discuss Burma's possible future as a federal state. Yet the KNU abandoned the talks on Sunday (31 Aug), one day after the UNFC stated that all ethnic groups would work together to see federalism come to pass.

KNU Commander-in-Chief Mutu Say Poe signed the letter to the UNFC that stated "No KNU representative will be sent for UNFC for coming term," and that "the KNU will later decide in KNU central committee whether KNU will join UNFC or not."

The General Secretary of Burma's oldest armed resistance group explained that the UNFC was stepping on their toes. "This [UNFC] organisation is costing us our autonomy," said General Secretary Padoh Kwe Htoo Win. "It is a top-down structure where we are expected to hand over our fate to the leadership. We cannot accept that." "We must continue to represent the Karen people, and the UNFC is not always considering their best interests."

The UNFC conference follows talks in August between its ethnic partners, the National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), and government peace negotiators in Yangon. On that occasion, the government said it agreed – in principle – to the concept of Burmese federalism.⁴

FIGHTING BREAKS OUT BETWEEN PA-O AND SHAN ARMIES

An armed clash erupted on 3 September morning in southern Shan State between troops of the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA).

According to Khun Myint Tun, the chairman of the PNLA's political wing, the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), fighting broke out at dawn around the village of NongTon Ki in Mauk Mae Township and continued all morning. The PNLO chairman declined to give out details of how and why the battle broke out, but suggested it could be linked to a residential development project that is currently going ahead in the area.

The fighting occurred at the Nong Ton Ki village in Kadugyi area, where the PNLA (?) has been based following a ceasefire agreement with the Union Government. "We are constructing a new residential zone called Khanpake in the Kadugyi area," said Chairman Khun Myint Tun. "This is intended as a place for our soldiers and their families to live, and is being implemented in cooperation with the central government."

³ Vice president and diplomats visit relief camps in Rakhine State –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/5/09/2014/id-13130> (NLM) 5 September 2014 (p. 9) /
Rakhine Chief Minister urges foreign aid agencies to exert effort on welfare of locals –
<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/5/09/2014/id-13130> (NLM) 5 September 2014 (p. 1)

⁴ KNU suspends membership of ethnic alliance –
<http://english.dvb.no/news/knu-suspends-membership-of-ethnic-alliance/43743> (DVB) 1 September 2014

He noted that on 21 August the SSA-S had arrested 3 soldiers from the PNLO, though he did not directly attribute that incident to this recent violence. The Pa-O leader added that he has called for the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) to send a delegation to resolve the matter.

On 23 August, SSA-S chief Lt-Gen. Yawd Serk reportedly sent a letter to the PNLO command, requesting it to withdraw Pa-O troops from the area. The letter had apparently alluded to an announcement that Naypyidaw had recognised the disputed area as a Pa-O autonomous region.

Both, the PNLO and the SSA-S, have signed ceasefire agreements with the Burmese government; however while the Pa-O have attended nationwide ceasefire talks in recent months while the Shan State army has not fully committed to the current peace process.⁵

POLITICAL PARTIES BEGIN PLANNING FOR POST-CEASEFIRE DIALOGUE

More than 30 political parties attended at a meeting held in Yangon on 3 September to discuss preliminary talks on the political dialogue due to begin after a national ceasefire agreement is signed. The meeting was organised by the National Brotherhood Federation (NBF), a coalition of ethnic political parties that established the Federal Union Party in December 2013.

NBF Deputy Chairman Saw Than Myint said all 67 registered political parties would be invited to further preliminary talks on 13 to 14 September. National Democratic Front (NDF) chairman Khin Maung Swe said future meetings would focus on agreeing a framework for the political dialogue. "The fundamental points will be the emergence of a democratic and federal union and providing for self-administration," he said.

Han Shwe, an executive committee member of the National Unity Party (NUP), said he was looking forward to participating in future meetings and that he expected discussions to include who will participate in drafting the framework and the concerns of ethnic national groups.

Unity and Peace Party Aung Chairman Than Tint expressed disappointment that the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party and the National League for Democracy were not represented at the meeting though the two parties are expected to attend future meetings, he said.⁶

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION CHAIR CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE

Following a visit to camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin State, the chair of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Win Mya called for a nationwide ceasefire deal between the government and armed ethnic groups to be signed immediately. "The ceasefire is not enough to achieve peace, but it is the first step," he said.

The armed conflicts that began after regaining independence have damaged many communities, Win Mya noted, adding that even under the current government there are about 100,000 IDPs in Kachin State due to clashes between Union troops and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

"Our commission is hoping for an immediate nationwide ceasefire deal. If the nationwide ceasefire is successful, ethnic groups will enjoy the fruits of peace. The ceasefire and peace will contribute much to the enhancement of the human rights," Win Mya said.

He added that Commission members visited IDP camps in Kachin State and gave assistance to IDPs, however, besides the harm it does to people and property, armed conflict remains an obstacle for democratic reforms nationwide.

⁵ Fighting breaks out between Pa-O and Shan armies – <http://english.dvb.no/news/fighting-breaks-out-between-pa-o-and-shan-armies-burma-myanmar/43814> (DVB) 3 September 2014

⁶ Political parties begin planning for post-ceasefire dialogue – <http://www.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/politics/item/12454-political-parties-begin-planning-for-post-ceasefire-dialogue> (Mizzima) 4 September 2014

“In my opinion, achieving ceasefire is not enough. Much more must be done. Development projects will have to be carried out in places where fighting is taking place, but the peace process can only continue once a ceasefire is achieved. The ceasefire is the first step,” Win Mya said.⁷

ARAKAN OFFICIALS SNUB OIC OFFERS OF HELP

An 8-member delegation of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) led by former Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar made a 2-day trip to Arakan State from 3-4 September to visit camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and meet local Arakanese officials and civil society groups.

However, local authorities complained that they were not properly informed of the visit and again turned down the OIC’s request to establish a presence in the state, which has suffered from deadly bouts of interreligious violence between Buddhists and Muslims for more than 2 years. The OIC has made no comment on the trip.

Arakan State officials said that they were told an informal group was due to visit the region, but had not been prepared for an official delegation from the 57-member state bloc. “What we were told was that a group led by the former foreign minister of Malaysia was coming to meet with us,” said State Information Officer Oo Oo Hla Thein. “They didn’t tell us they were here on an official OIC mission – only that they were representatives who wanted to listen to local views about the OIC. The last time they came protests broke out, so I really don’t know what they were thinking.”

Arakan State Chief Minister Maung Maung Ohn, who met with the delegation on 3 September, said that the Arakanese people could not yet accept OIC’s presence there. “The Chief Minister updated them on the situation in Rakhine [Arakan], and explained that we are not yet ready to accept OIC,” said Oo Oo Hla Thein. “We are currently working on nationality verification. If that is successful, we will start working on IDP rehabilitation. “When we come to the issue of rehabilitation, we will seek opinions from the public,” the Chief Minister said. “If they are willing to accept OIC assistance, then we will permit them to become involved.” He said the OIC delegation did not discuss details, but listened to local opinions, including input from town elders, women’s groups and a youth network.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on 4 September that the OIC had offered to build a hospital and other facilities, but that the local government said the projects cannot be implemented until stability is restored following communal violence.⁸

⁷ Rights commission calls for immediate ceasefire – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7398:rights-commission-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 2 September 2014

⁸ Arakan officials snub OIC offers of help – <https://www.dvb.no/news/arakan-officials-snub-oic-offers-of-help-burma-myanmar/43863> (DVB) 5 September 2014

ANALYSIS

The recent walk-out by the KNU from the UNFC Congress could have an adverse effect on the on-going peace talks and is a clear indication that there exist different views among the ethnic groups, in conducting the nationwide ceasefire and political talks with the government.

This latest incident will not serve the best interest of either the government or the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). It behoves the UNFC to re-examine its internal procedures. If as the KNU claims, the decision-making is top down and does not take into consideration its member's need, the alliance cannot succeed in its objective to build unity. The leaders of the UNFC are not the key decision-makers in their own organizations, so how can they expect their unilateral decisions to be obeyed by their own top leaders, especially if they are not consulted before hand?

It also highlights the fact that the UNFC cannot truly speak on behalf of all the ethnic armed organizations as it claims. The United Wa State Army with 30,000 troops, Restoration Council for Shan State with 7,000 troops National Democratic Alliance Army with 2,000 troops, and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Kaplan) with at least 1,000 troops in Myanmar, are not members of the UNFC nor the NCCT which is negotiating a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the Government. Those not represented by the UNFC total 45,000 troops (if the KNU leaves the UNFC). In contrast, the biggest group within the UNFC is the KIO with 10,000 troops. Add to this the twelve other smaller groups and the grand total is about 18,000 troops. Given this discrepancy, the government needs to ensure that the negotiations being conducted by the NCCT is in line with the opinion of the other groups. Otherwise, they may not agree to sign the NCA.