

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.9

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN ARRIVES NORWAY AS PART OF 5-NATION EUROPEAN TOUR

President Thein Sein began his official visits to five European Union (EU) countries – Norway, Finland, Austria, Belgium and Italy in a bid to enhance relations with the west. President U Thein Sein met Norwegian Prime Minister Mr Jens Stoltenberg held talks at the government guest house in Oslo on 27 February. The two discussed a wide-range of issues including Burma's democratic transition, lifting of sanctions and resolving the conflicts in Kachin and Rakhine States. President Thein Sein expressed his thanks for Norway's role in getting the Paris Club in reducing Burma's international debt of over 6 billion US dollars, including the relief of 534 million dollars debt Burma owed to Norway. The President also reiterated his desire to further promote cooperation between the two countries on political reforms, peace building, economic reforms and environmental conservation. The Norwegian PM pledged continued support for democratic transition, economic reforms and peace process and improved diplomatic ties and to share its experience of management of natural resources to Burma. The Burmese President also met Norwegian Foreign Minister Mr. Espen Barth Eide and discussed the on-going reform process in Burma and Norway's continued support in collaboration with EU countries.¹

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 19th day session on 22nd February. Discussions on the Foreign Investment Law were debated at the session.

- **The Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann held a closed door meeting with cabinet members including Deputy National Planning and Economic Development Minister and discussed the bylaw derived from the landmark Foreign Investment Law passed in November 2012;**
- **MP U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency (NDF) promptly proposed the delay of the discussion of the bylaw by the parliament and indicated three provisions in the drafted bylaw which deviate from the law, calling it "unconstitutional";**
- **The Speaker rejected the proposal, stating that the bylaw had already been discussed by line ministries, respective committees and representatives for several times. Consequently, the Bill Committee, MPs and the deputy minister proposed a number of amendments;**
- **The Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker assigned the bill committee to review the provision that the committee and the deputy minister could not reach a consensus. The area of debated was**

¹ President U Thein Sein arrives Oslo, Norway –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 February 2013 (p. 1)/

Myanmar thanks Norway's help in democratic transition –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 February 2013 (p. 1)/

President U Thein Sein meets Norwegian Foreign Affairs Minister –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 February 2013 (p. 16)/

Myanmar president's 5-country tour to enhance ties with EU countries –

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-02/25/c_132190511.htm (Xinhua News) 25 February 2013

centered on the ceiling of foreign investments in limited areas whether the foreign investors should be allowed 49 percent or 80 percent of investment ratio.²

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 20th day meeting on 27th February. The key issue raised during the session included:

- U Khine Maung Yi of Ahlon Constituency (NDF) raised the question on the **plans to build a hydro power plant across the Salween (Thanlwin) River and the power generated from it would be exported to a neighbouring country.** In responding the Deputy Minister U Myint Zaw of Electric Power said that **there was no plan to supply water coming out at the spillway of the dams to a neighbouring country. He also stated that six hydropower plants would be built along Thanlwin River using foreign investments.**³

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 19th day meeting on 22nd February. During the session the following issues were discussed:

- The Bill Committee of Amyotha Hluttaw submitted **two reports on Bill Amending Property Transfer Act and Bill Revoking 1945 Immovable Property Act.** The session approved the two reports for submission to the Pyithu Hluttaw;
- U Saw Tun Mya Aung of Kayin State Constituency (5) (USDP) urging the **Union government to open youth nurseries in border areas was discussed by four MPs and clarified by Deputy Religious Affairs Minister Dr Maung Maung Htay;**
- Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye of Kayin State Constituency (6) (USDP) and U Hmat Gyi of Mandalay Region Constituency (9) (USDP) submitted **proposals on urbanization of border town Muse in Shan State and organ donation.** The Hluttaw decided to discuss the proposals.⁴

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 20th day meeting on 27th February. During the session the following issues were discussed:

- The Bill Committee submitted **its reports on the Bill amending Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Law and the Bill amending the National Food Law, and Amyotha Hluttaw approved the two bills;**
- MPs held discussions on the **proposal on urging the Union government to adopt the policy for the competitiveness of SMEs in 2015 ASEAN Economic Community,** submitted by Dr Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No.8 (USDP).⁵

² Investment ceiling under hot debate as FDI Bylaw put on table at Pyithu Hluttaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 February 2013 (p. 9)

³ No plan to supply water at spillway to neighbouring country: Deputy Minister - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 February 2013 (p. 9)

⁴ Bill Committee submits two reports to Amyotha Hluttaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 February 2013 (p.9)

⁵ Proposal on adopting policy for competitiveness of SMEs in 2015 ASEAN Economic Community approved – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 February 2013 (p. 9)

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 13th day meeting on 25th February. Two key issues at the session included the appointment of the Constitutional Tribunal and discussions on the 2013-14 national planning bill:

- Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint read out the message sent by the President on the nomination of chairman and members of the Constitutional Tribunal. Hluttaw approved the appointment of Retd Director-General of Supreme Court of the Union U Mya Thein as Chairman of the Constitutional Tribunal and members;
- The Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw, Thura Shwe Mann urged and called for providing decent salary and allowance to civil servants by adjusting ordinary expenditure without requesting extra budget, enacting laws protecting farmers, breeders and workers as a projection against way of alleviating poverty, enforcing effective laws and address unemployment;
- called for legislation for internal peace and funding the effort’;
- called on relevant departments to seek approval from the parliament with regard to their taxation move in 2013-14 fiscal year beginning April;
- called for appointing community-based teachers officially with decent salary and allowance starting the coming fiscal year;
- urged coordination for appointing newly-graduated doctors, reducing the healthcare gap between urban and rural areas and upgrading dispensaries and hospitals;
- and encouraged parliament members to face any criticism in approving the national plan, budget and taxation law for the coming fiscal year.⁶

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 14th day meeting on 26th February. During the session discussions were focussed on the National Planning Bill 2013 -2014:

- Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye of Kayin State Constituency No.6 (USDP) discussed the budgets of departments under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Cooperatives;
- U Saw Tun Mya Aung of Kayin State Constituency No.5 (USDP) discussed the budget for religious buildings in border regions;
- U Hla Swe of Magway Region Constituency No.12 (USDP) suggested that the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry should revise the budgets for alternatives fire wood and modern stoves and reserved forests and also made the comparison between educational budget and defence budgets and gave the example of peace investment in Sri Lanka;
- Pyithu Hluttaw Transport, Communications and Construction Committee suggested that new affordable housing projects should be implemented as current low-cost housing prices are out of reach of low-income families.⁷

⁶ Now is time to face bravely and wisely with genuine goodwill –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 February 2013 (p. 9)/
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw highlights national Development –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 February 2013 (p. 16)

⁷ Low-cost housing projects not low enough for low-income families –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 February 2013 (p. 9)

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KIO POSTPONE PEACE TALKS

Senior representatives of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) have informed the government's negotiations team that they are not ready to meet for further peace talks. The next round of peace talks which were supposed to take place before the end of February are now expected to happen sometime in early March. Last week government representatives met senior KIO officials in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai during as part of talks between the government and the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an alliance of Burma's armed ethnic groups which includes the KIO.

The government and their KIO counterparts have held formal and informal talks in the past since the Kachin conflict began in June 2011. Field reports indicate that the Burmese army is using the slowdown in fighting to send more reinforcements to front line positions.

On February 25 Kachin Independence Army troops exchanged fire with army units from Infantry Battalion 200. The firefight took place north of Lawk Hkawng, in the Pangwa region located near the China Burma border. During the fighting government troops were supported by members of the Border Guard Force 1002 (formerly part of New Democratic Army - Kachin).⁸

BURMA ARMY REINFORCING TROOPS IN RECENT BATTLE SCENE WITH RCSS/SSA

According to local sources the Burma Army (BA) has been reinforcing its troops around recent battle scene with the Restoration Council of Shan State/ Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), in Kholam area. Village elders were worried of the escalating military tension when soldiers from Nam Zang Township headed for the battle scene that had erupted four days ago. It seems that they are moving towards the battle scene on Sunday, 24 February", said a member of a political party. A fire fight broke out on 24 February from 2:30 to 3:30 P.M. between the RCSS/SSA and a column from Burma Army's IB 66 based in Kholam, Southern Shan State, killing 5, including its leader, Col Kyaw Myint Htun. Meanwhile, Major Dewing, representative of the RCSS/SSA in Kholam liaison office, who was said to be detained by the BA, has been released from Central-eastern Command office and that he was only questioned and not detained, as has been rumored.⁹

CEASEFIRE: BURMA ARMY INCREASES ITS MILITARIZATION IN KNU CONTROLLED AREAS

Middle-ranking Karen army officers claim that the Burma Army has taken advantage of last year's historic ceasefire, signed between the government and the Karen National Union, to reinforce its position in territory controlled by the ethnic armed group. Captain Saw Gyi No, the KNU Tee Mo Pwa area administration chairman for Mergui-Tavoy District, in southern Burma said, "This week the Burma Army has taken up positions in the KNU area in Ahmla and Baw Ya Ka Hta, close to the KNU's Mergui-Tavoy District HQ and that the army's positions are strategically close to Myitta village and along the Italian-Thai Development Company car road. "There are now more than nine Burma Army checkpoints along Italian-Thai Development Company car road and that they are taking advantage of the ceasefire by increasing their military positions as well as extorting money from road users. According to a KNU military source the Burma Army has concentrated its troops along the Italian-Thai Development car road. The KNU military source said the Burma Army operates from East of Myitta village to Kamaplaw and there are at least 20 Burma Army positions from two battalions

⁸ KIO not ready for peace talks this week, as army resupplies frontline – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2488-kio-not-ready-for-peace-talks-this-week-as-army-resupplies-frontline.html> (KNG) 28 February 2013

⁹ Burma Army reinforcing troops in recent battle scene with RCSS/SSA – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5283:burma-army-reinforcing-troops-in-recent-battle-scene-with-rcssssa&catid=86:war&Itemid=284 (S.H.A.N.) 1 March 2013

under the command of the Burma Army Coastal Region Military Command and three battalions under the 19 Operation Commanding HQ.¹⁰

REBEL ETHNIC ARMIES TO ATTEND SHAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE NEXT MONTH

Shan and Kayah armed groups will attend the Shan national conference in Lashio, northern Shan State, next month, representatives said. Eleven political parties and 14 armed Shan and Kayah groups that have made peace with the government have been invited to the conference, according to the Shan National League for Democracy, which is organising the conference. The political parties represent various ethnic groups – Shan, Kokant, Pao, Danu, Inn, Wa and Kayan – and the 14 armed groups comprise eight Kayah and six Shan armies. The theme of the Shan conference is “building trust for peace”. It is the second of a three-step process, Shan representatives said. The first step was a three-day meeting in Yangon last November and the third step will be a conference drawing representatives from all ethnic groups and the government.¹¹

CHIN DELEGATION MEETS SPEAKER OF LOWER HOUSE THURA SHWE MANN

A delegation from the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) met the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) on 25 February and expressed their concerns regarding the on-going violations of human rights in Chin State. During the meeting, CHRO officials told the Speaker that religious freedom in Chin State was still persistent and hoped that the new parliament will provide better protection of human rights of Chin people. The three-member delegation presented the Speaker with a copy of CHRO's recent report entitled "Threats to Our Existence: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma," which details cases of violations of religious freedom against Chin Christians by State actors over the past many years. The Speaker stated that he is aware of 'past wrongs' against the Chins and the need to rectify mistakes from the past was crucial and necessary. According to CHRO, serious violations of religious freedom continue in Chin State even as the new government of President Thein Sein is undertaking reforms in many areas. CHRO's report shows that at least four large Christian crosses were destroyed in Chin State since the new government assumed power in March 2011, while all discriminatory restrictions on Christians under the previous regime remain a State policy, including restrictions against the construction of Christian churches.¹²

WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK AIMS TO JOIN KACHIN PEACE TALKS

The Peace Negotiation Women's Network (PNWN) a newly formed women's peace group has sent an official request to the President that it be allowed to take part in the peace process to end the on-going conflict in Kachin State. According to Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe of the group, women should be allowed to participate in the work related to peace building, violence against women in refugee camps and to report their findings to the relevant authorities. The network was formed in Yangon during a recent meeting held from January 30 to February 1 attended by 30 women's organizations.¹³

¹⁰ Ceasefire: Burma Army increases its militarization in KNU controlled areas – <http://karennews.org/2013/03/ceasefire-burma-army-increases-its-militarization-in-knu-controlled-areas.html/> (Karen News) 1 March 2013

¹¹ Rebel ethnic armies to attend Shan national conference next month – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/national/2631-rebel-ethnic-armies-to-attend-shan-national-conference-next-month> (Eleven News Media) 27 February 2013

¹² Chin delegation raised issue of religious freedom with Speaker of Burmese Parliament – <http://chinlandguardian.com/news-2009/2021-chin-delegation-raised-issue-of-religious-freedom-with-speaker-of-burmese-parliament.html> (Chinland Guardian) 26 February 2013

¹³ Women's peace network aims to join Kachin peace talks – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/national/2635-women-s-peace-network-aims-to-join-kachin-peace-talks> (Eleven News Media) 1 March 2013

ANALYSIS

At a time when peace talks are taking shape and calls for the inclusion of women groups in future peace talks are being mooted, the reoccurrence of fighting between government forces and the Restoration Council of Shan State/ Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) during the past week, will not help the national reconciliation process. However, if left unresolved, the fighting could increase mistrust between the government and cease-fire groups, and even as it did in the Kachin case. Similarly, the increased military presence in KNU controlled territory along the Italian-Thai Development Project road, has become a cause for concern recently. If the cease-fires are to hold, monitoring is necessary. The government has agreed to ceasefire monitoring in several of the agreements it has signed. But once again, implementation is a problem. Unless the government can implement the ceasefire agreements it has signed, the whole peace process can unravel.