

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.8

OFFICIAL MEDIA

RAKHINE STATE GOVT TO CONDUCT INVESTIGATION INTO RECENT RIOTS IN SITTWAY

The Rakhine State government will carry out a probe into riots that took place on 26 and 27 March that targeted offices and residences of international aid organizations in Sittway, Rakhine State.

In the first incident on 26 March at around 8.30 pm, around 50 locals surrounded a facility rented by the humanitarian organization Malteser International, hurling stones at the house. The attack came in response to the removal of a Buddhist flag hoisted at the house, with officials saying that the project coordinator of the organization Yvonne Dunton had taken down the flag. The crowd dispersed around 11.30 pm after local authority and Buddhist monks intervened. Following the incidence, Dunton and her husband fled to the house of a man identified as U Aye Tun Sein located in Gaukshi Road. As the mob moved towards the house to demand the handover of the woman, police arrived to escort her and her husband to a guesthouse owned by the local police force. Later, around 300 people destroyed several offices and residences of international aid workers—the house of U Pan Tha on U Uttama Road, the Malteser Office in the house of U Kyaw Than on Gaukshi Road, the MSF office in the house of U Than Aung on U Uttama Road, the MSF office in the house of U Tin Hlaing on Gaukshi Road and the Malteser Office in the house of Daw Than Than Myint on U Uttama Road. The security forces had to fire about 100 warning shots and the crowd dispersed around midnight.

On the morning of 27 March at around 10.45 am, a crowd of 200 local people surrounded a residence of ICRC workers in Sittway, throwing stones and damaging windows as well as breaking the windshield of a car. The crowd dispersed around 11.50 am as the security forces fired 5 warning shots and the crowd dispersed. The office of UNHCR was attacked the same day in Sittway by a mob which hurled stones, with the OCHA office and a garage used by the WFP also targeted. Security forces fired 15 warning shots. A total of 71 aid workers, including 32 foreigners, have been evacuated and are now staying at the guest house of the local police force. Local authorities and monks have called on all people to abide by the rule of law, with the local police force saying it is providing security to the international aid workers. The Ministry of Home Affairs has announced that it will carry out an investigation into the incidents, and that actions will be taken against those who got involved in the incidents.¹

PRESIDENT: 6-DECADE LONG CIVIL WAR TO END SOON, BUT ARMED FORCES WILL CONTINUE TO BE INCLUDED IN NEGOTIATIONS TO SOLVE POLITICAL ISSUES

President Thein Sein delivered a speech to mark the 3rd anniversary of his government at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) on 26 March. He expressed his delight with the country's achievement of national consolidation to a satisfactory extent and a new political culture of partnership. He also expressed gratitude to the international community for their support for the country's economic reform and for helping Myanmar to get on the right track in a stable manner towards a democratic society and development. The President also expressed the government's commitment to encouraging responsible investments, to ensure that investment related to extracting natural resources will not affect the environment and socio-economic situation. Regarding the dispute on farmlands across the country, he urged MPs and responsible persons from the land utilization management offices to collaborate to find justifiable solutions as the government wants to make sure that ownership is true and authentic in accordance with the existing laws. Regarding a nationwide ceasefire agreement between the government and ethnic armed groups, the president

¹ Rakhine State Govt to conduct investigation into riots targeting offices, residences of int'l aid groups – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-28.pdf> (NLM) 28 March 2014 (p. 1)

said that agreements have been reached between the government and the leaders of the ethnic armed groups, and that a nationwide peace agreement will be signed soon. "I believe that the conflicts that have lasted for over sixty years will soon come to an end," Thein Sein said.

Concerning the country's democratic transition, he said that the Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) will continue to play a role in the democratic transition and that the inclusion of the military in the political negotiations of the country was needed. "We will be able to steadily reduce the role of our Armed Forces as we mature in democracy, and make progress in our peace building efforts," he said.²

PRESIDENT VISITS KACHIN STATE

President Thein Sein promised to build a free and open society that encourages full participation of all national races during an inspection tour of Kachin State on 17 March. In his meeting with parliamentarians, ethnic leaders and local in Myitkyina, the President called for resolute action to resolve the disputes, drawing comparisons with the past and stressing that a "blame game creates evil consequences." He assured the people in Kachin State of his determination to move towards a lasting peace inspired by all people. Apart from reaching a ceasefire, a political dialogue is imperative to bringing about political dialogue between the two sides in making peace, he added.

The President pledged to start political dialogue shortly after signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement and guaranteed that the Defence Services and the government stands united in working on peace. Thein Sein also stressed that the implementation of peace and stability are his administration's main goals. He also gave accounts of ongoing political, economic and administrative reforms. The President also called for building "Unity in Diversity" among different religious groups at a meeting with Christian leaders and added that the move was crucial as the "country has to achieve the common goal of stability, peace and unity of all national people of different faiths." In a meeting with faculty members and students, he said human resources play an important role in carrying out reforms, and that the government is building more educational facilities to invest into the youth. He also called on students to "cultivate" the Union Spirit and build a peaceful future for future generations.³

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RECEIVES MEMBERS OF THE ELDERS GROUP

The progress on peace with ethnic groups, stability and democratization were top on the agenda during a meeting between President Thein Sein and 2 member of the Elders Group - former Norwegian Prime Minister Dr. Gro Harlem and former Finnish President and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Martti Ahtisaari. They discussed the provision of assistance and advice by the Elders, systematic utilization of natural resources, and the challenges of the upcoming census and the promotion and development of health sector in Burma.

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing also received the Deputy Chair of the Elders PM Brundtland and discussed the ceasefire and peace-making process with ethnic

² President marks 3rd anniversary of the government with speech: Six-decade long civil war to end soon, but Armed Forces will continue to be included in negotiations to solve political issues –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 March 2014 (p. 1)

³ President promises "free society" during Kachin visit –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 March 2014 (p. 1)/
President U Thein Sein calls for building "Unity in Diversity" among religions groups –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 March 2014 (p. 16)/
Scholarships to be awarded to outstanding students –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2014 (p. 1 & 8)/
President U Thein Sein calls on national people to cooperate for peace –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2014 (p. 2)

armed organizations, issue of the constitution, cooperation in the affairs of UN Peacekeeping Troops and women's duties including Defence Services Personnel MPs.⁴

PRESIDENT RECEIVES EU TRADE COMMISSIONER

President Thein Sein received EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht on 20 March and discussed the increase of Burmese export volumes to the European Union, trade promotion, improvement of the social economy, the signing of a trade agreement, technical assistance for export goods, meeting EU standards and encouraging more investments by EU entrepreneurs in Burma. Commissioner De Gucht also held talks with the Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Kan Zaw and discussed potentials to sign an investment protection agreement between EU and Burma which will bring accountability in sustainable investment protecting foreign investors.⁵

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE MINISTER SOE THANE VISITS EUROPE, MEETS EU COMMISSIONERS

Minister at the President Office Soe Thane held talks with European Union commissioners over climate change issues and renewable energy problems during his visit to Europe from 17 to 23 March. He also discussed issues related to aid from the European Union to Burma, development and humanitarian issues, progress of democratization reforms in Burma, regional issues in Rakhine State and health care services provided by Médecins Sans Frontières also known as Doctors Without Borders-MSF's activities in the country.

During his visit to Paris and Brussels, Minister Soe Thane held the talks with senior EU officials including High Representative Baroness Ashton, and the Commissioner for Energy Guenther Oettinger, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response Kristalina Georgieva as well as the Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs. Minister Soe Thane also participated in a forum conducted by the Assistance Technique France (Adetef) along with ministers and civil leaders from Africa, Europe and Middle-East Region.⁶

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER

President Thein Sein received Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida on 25 March and discussed the implementation of Thilawa Special Economic Zone, the launching survey of the Dawei Special Economic Zone, the survey of upgrading Yangon-Nay Pyi Taw-Mandalay Railroad, the expansion of the Mandalay International Airport and other projects in cooperation with Japan. FM Kishida also pledged to provide 24 billion Yen in fresh loans to Burma to finance a power plant and electricity networks during the meeting. The Japanese Foreign Minister also held a meeting with his Burmese counterpart Wunna Maung Lwin, and signed a memorandum of understanding on six "Grant Aid" projects worth 7.7 billion Yen including projects providing emergency food assistance to displaced persons in Rakhine, Kachin and Northern States and promoting national reconciliation in Burma. The foreign ministers also discussed territorial and maritime disputes that should be addressed during upcoming ASEAN meetings chaired by Burma.⁷

⁴ President U Thein Sein discusses peace process with Nobel Laureate and implementation of controversial Economic Zone with Japanese FM –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 3) /

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, The Elders focus on ceasefire and peace-making process with armed ethnic groups –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 March 2014 (p. 2)

⁵ Exports discussed with European Union officials –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2014 (p. 2) /

EU, Myanmar to sign investment protection agreement –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2014 (p. 4)

⁶ Union Minister at President Office discusses climate change with EU commissioners –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 2)

⁷ Japan to offer 8 bil. yen in fresh grant aid to Myanmar –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 March 2014 (p. 2) /

VICE-CHAIR OF PEACE MAKING COMMITTEE MEETS MONGLA LEADERS

The Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) U Thein Zaw met with representatives of Mongla Special Region (4) in Mongla, Shan State on 23 March and said that meetings for signing of a nationwide ceasefire for permanent peace are expected to be held in April. During the UPWC's tour of Mongla Region, he expressed the committee's willingness to create a win-win situation through collaboration and cooperation between the two sides for the sake of the country and the region. He also invited all parties who had reached State level and Union level ceasefire agreements with the government to participate in the signing of nationwide ceasefire agreement that contains firm political guarantees.

Chairman of Mongla Special Region (4) U Sai Lin vowed to strive for socio-economic development of people in the region while taking part in peace-making process.

Commander-in-Chief (Army) Office Lt-Gen Myint Soe said that armed forces stands united with the government and parliament and cooperates with national race organizations in the process to achieve a lasting peace. Myint Soe cited the active participation of Defence Services in the peace process as the reason for the true willingness of Defence Services to make peace and that increased connectivity between the two sides could realize trust-building and mutual understanding. Both sides also issued a joint-statement at the conclusion of the meeting. (*Please see Appendix A for full text of the Joint Statement*).⁸

UEC CHAIRMAN CALLS FOR PREPARATIONS OF 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

Union Election Commission Chairman Tin Aye has called for the upcoming general elections in 2015 to be prepared well in order for them to be free and fair. At a meeting between the Union Election Commission and Region/State election sub-commissions on 18 March, Tin Aye said that a strategic plan has been drawn up for the holding of a free and fair general elections slated for late 2015. He said that the commission has asked political parties for suggestions and stressed that the commission is striving for laying down rules for election campaigns. A pilot-project on ballot collection in urban and rural areas and "unsafe" places will be implemented later this year by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) in collaboration with the UEC and the election sub-commissions.⁹

Myanmar, Japan discuss wide range of bilateral relations –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 March 2014 (p. 3) /

President U Thein Sein discusses peace process with Nobel Laureate and implementation of controversial Economic Zone with Japanese FM –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 3) /

Japan pledges to provide 24 billion yen in fresh loans to Myanmar –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 1) /

Japanese government grants US\$ 1,104,672 for eight grass-roots projects for education and health sectors –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2014 (p. 1)

⁸ Meetings for signing of nationwide ceasefire for permanent peace expected to be held in April –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 March 2014 (p. 3 & 9)

⁹ UEC Chairman calls for preparations of 2015 general elections –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2014 (p. 4)

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 25th day meeting on 14 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- The Pyithu Hluttaw Education Promotion Committee and the Ministry of Education submitted their **respective National Education Bills to Pyithu Hluttaw**.
- According to the ministry, **the bill is to improve the physical and mental potential of youth, to turn out law-abiding citizens who uphold code of ethics and democratic practices. Learning, research and academic administration will be improved through effective use of ICT, and enable each and every citizen to have access to education and lifelong learning opportunities and to create an educational environment of international standards.**
- **The Bill amending the 1951 Leave and Holiday Acts** was also presented to the session. Deputy Minister U Htain Aung elaborated on aims and objectives of amendments to the Act and added that the new law will be of great benefit to all employees in addition to workers from the private sector, allowing them to enjoy more leave and holidays, and that the new law will ensure maternity leave and benefits for women employees.¹⁰

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 26th day meeting on 17 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Minister for Information U Aung Kyi said that **the Public Media Bill had been submitted and stressed the need to transform state-run media into a public service media in the country. He added that the ministry had drafted the bill with the assistance of UNESCO so that the bill could be in conformity with the Principles of Diversity of media pluralism. Only public service media can help the country to ensure narrowing the “knowledge gap” among national people.**
- The Minister also stated that **out of the country’s literate population of 49 million, 43 million living mostly in rural areas could not afford to subscribe to newspapers and that freedom of expression cannot develop without media pluralism. And if parliament approved the Public Service Media Bill, there will be media pluralism with public service media, state-owned media, joint-venture media, non-profit media and ethnic- and community-owned media in Burma.**¹¹

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 27th day meeting on 18 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- The session **approved the bill to Recall Hluttaw Representatives. The bill stipulates the recall of parliamentarians should one percent of voters of their constituency file complaints.**¹²

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 28th day meeting on 20 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Chairman of the Union Election Commission (UEC) U Tin Aye said **the Election Commission plans to hold a by-election for 30 vacant constituencies and that the UEC will announce the date for the by-election 3 months before polling start.**

¹⁰ Two separate National Education Bills submitted to People’s Parliament – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2014 (p.16)

¹¹ Public Service Media Bill submitted to parliament – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2014 (p. 9)

¹² Pyithu Hluttaw gives green light to bill which allows recall of parliamentarians – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2014 (p. 3)

- Deputy Minister for Finance Dr Lin Aung said that Burma has a national debt of US\$ 9.5 billion to be paid off to 16 countries and three international financial institutions. **Regarding a question on how action will be taken against departments which are not carrying out tasks in conformity with financial rules and regulations, the Deputy Minister replied that the Ministry of Finance is taking necessary measures to fight tax evasion. According to the Section 96 of the constitution, the Union Government collects income tax, commercial tax, stamp duty, lottery tax, and according to the Section 254 of the constitution, regional and state governments collect remaining nine taxes.**¹³

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 29th day meeting on 21 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- National Education Bill with **13 points of amendment from parliamentarians and nine points from the Bill Committee was approved at the session;**
- Regarding two questions on **electrical power supply and infrastructure existing power grids, Minister for Electric Power U Aung Than Oo** stated that **works to replace concrete electric posts will be carried out in Bago Region and infrastructure works also be done in Laikha Township, Shan State accordingly. He admitted that the ministry's annual budgets were not well enough for installation of power lines to all villages in the country within a few years to come, pointing out that 42000 villages across the nation still remain to have access to electricity.**¹⁴

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 25th day meeting on 14 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Discussions on **the Bill to amend the Law on Salaries, Allowances and Insignias of Union-Level** were held during the session. **MPs who took part in the discussions seconded the Bill, but some expressed their views that careful consideration should be given before passing the bill as it may have impact on financial market and commodity prices of the country while others called for simultaneous measures to take care of pay rates of all government employees.**¹⁵

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 26th day meeting on 17 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Vice-Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar Daw Khin Saw Oo briefed the session on **plans to release rules and regulations regarding the Foreign Exchange Management Law. She added by saying that private banks which have authorized dealers licenses can lend foreign currency in accordance with the law to those who are living in the country. According to the vice-governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar, the private banks which have an authorized dealers license can increase their foreign exchange capital, accepting savings made by depositors and borrowing foreign currency from local and foreign financial market. She urged private banks to ensure development of financial markets and keeping enough savings at their banks as part of efforts for lending foreign currency to their customers.**¹⁶

¹³ UEC to hold by-election in 30 constituencies –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2014 (p. 2)

¹⁴ Pyithu Hluttaw passes National Education Bill –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-22.pdf> (NLM) 22 March 2014 (p. 9)

¹⁵ Two separate National Education Bills submitted to People's Parliament –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2014 (p. 16)

¹⁶ Central Bank of Myanmar to release rules & regulations of Foreign Exchange Management Law soon –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2014 (p. 9)

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 27th day meeting on 18 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **Cyanide use and banning in gold mining sector** was discussed during the session. Deputy Minister for Mines U Than Tun Aung stated that **punitive actions will be taken against illegal cyanide users as gold miners in Burma are weak in cyanide use. Under effective security plans, cyanide use and storage have been allowed to major gold miners, within limits, but use of cyanide is prohibited in gold mining on a manageable scale as it is hard to monitor the small companies whether they adhere the rules and regulations on cyanide use**, he added. The deputy minister responded to the question **calling for the systematic use of cyanide that it is required to make amendments to existing rules and regulations and directives before cyanide mining, which is highly dangerous, is allowed for small companies.**¹⁷

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 28th day meeting on 20 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **the Bill Amending the Political Parties Registration Law with amendments of members of the parliament was approved** by the session.¹⁸

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 29th day meeting on 24 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **the Bill on amending the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law** was discussed during the session. Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee, U Aung Myint Thein, gave **an account of the Bill that suggests amendments ensuring relaxation of restrictions on the application process and reduction of jail terms by a half. Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the Union Parliament, passed Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law on 2 December, 2011 in accord with the Section 354 (b) of the Constitution for enabling the citizens to enjoy rights of a peaceful assembly and peaceful procession.**
- **The Association Registration Bill and Standardization Bill** was also approved.¹⁹

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 30th day meeting on 26 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Attorney-General of the Union Dr Tun Shin welcomed a **proposal to form a commission in order to translate the existing Myanmar-language laws into English version ones**. He assured of **the readiness for translation from Myanmar to English despite a need for manpower in his office for translating 153 English-language laws into Myanmar version ones and said 89 laws enacted by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw have been translated into English version so far. He then elaborated on the process that will take about 2 years to finish.**²⁰

¹⁷ Pyithu Hluttaw gives green light to bill which allows recall of parliamentarians – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2014 (p. 3)

¹⁸ UEC to hold by-election in 30 constituencies – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2014 (p. 2)

¹⁹ Kachin ethnic groups to be counted as Kachin national race in upcoming census: Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 10)

²⁰ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concludes ninth regular session, stressing great strides in pursuit of peace and prosperity, rule of law – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 March 2014 (p. 3)

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 25th day meeting on 19 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approved the President's plans to raise electricity rates. Under the proposed increase in electricity bills, households using more than 200 units per month have to pay 50 kyats per unit while users with less than 100 units and 200 units per month have to see the rate of 35 kyats and 40 kyats per unit respectively. Industries that use more than 300,000 units are set to pay 100 kyats per unit while businesses using more than 50,000, and 200,000 units to pay 150 kyats and 125 kyats. Industries that use more than 500 units have to see 100 while enterprises using less than 300,000 units and 200,000 units are set to pay 125 kyats and 150 kyats.²¹

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 26th day meeting on 20 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw submitted the **National Planning Bill for 2014-2015 Fiscal Year** to the session. According to the new Bill, the government is committed to increase health and education sectors spending. The allocation to education will increase from K 908 billion in 2013-2014 FY to more than K 1142 billion, accounting for 5.9 per cent of the total spending. Likewise, health sector is targeted to increase from K 499 billion in 2013- 2014 FY to more than K 652 billion, accounting for 3.4 per cent. The Union Minister stated the newly-modified Bill would help to contribute in improving the needs of the entire people by boosting the government's investments in rural development including electrification, potable water supply and smooth transportation. According to the Bill, K 4.220 billion has been added to the State's original investment of K 6855.701 billion.²²

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 27th day meeting on 24 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **Proposals and discussions on the National Planning Bill for the 2014-2015 FY and the 2014 Union Budget Bill.** In his suggestion on the **Union Budget Bill**, U Thurein Zaw of Kawkareik Constituency said the Union government's assistance of K 1715.430 billion to regional and state governments and K 33 billion for the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Development Fund should be put under separate headings. He expressed his support for the National Planning Bill, saying that priorities of the Bill have been given on electrification and drinking water supply programmes.
- **Responding to a question about the census-taking process**, Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population U Win Myint said that despite the variety of Kachin ethnic groups, they will all be counted as the Kachin national race.²³

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 28th day meeting on 25 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- The session approved the **National Planning Bill for 2014-2015 FY and the 2014 Union Budget Bill.**

²¹ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves increase in electricity bills – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 March 2014 (p. 4)

²² Government's National Planning Bill to provide for increased spending on health, education sectors – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2014 (p. 9)

²³ Kachin ethnic groups to be counted as Kachin national race in upcoming census: Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 March 2014 (p. 10)

- Discussions on joining the UNESCO's Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage were discussed. Minister for Culture U Aye Myint Kyu elaborated on benefits of signing the convention that there will be more technical and financial assistance of international community to develop the conservation of traditional livelihoods and cultural heritages of Myanmar and also contribute towards promotion of Myanmar's tourism industry.
- The Bill Committee presented a report on the Bill amending the Political Parties Registration Law (State Peace and Development Council Law 2/2010).²⁴

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 29th day meeting on 26 March. The following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann also highlighted the completed tasks of the current session in which Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passed 21 laws including National Planning Bill, Union Budget Bill and Union Taxation Bill. The Speaker stressed the need of great strides in translating the nation into the one with peace and prosperity and the rule of law, calling on the entire people to cooperate with law enforcement organizations. He continued that Parliament coordinated matters related to land grab issues, taxation and electricity bills with administrative machinery for the sake of the country and its people. He stressed the need of a spirit of goodwill in making and passing fair and just laws that encourage national interest and could be truly adhered to by the citizens and called on MPs to follow and respect legislation.
- The 2014 Union Taxation Bill and Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Bill were approved.²⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

NCCT DELEGATES TO DRAFT NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

The Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) selected its 9-member delegation team to draft a nationwide ceasefire agreement together with a government team. The NCCT, a technical team working on the nationwide ceasefire agreement on behalf of the ethnic armed organizations previously agreed in its last meeting with the government's Union Peacemaking Work Committee in Rangoon, to form a joint committee of 18 members to draft a nationwide ceasefire agreement.

Following the NCCT's seminar in Chiang Mai on 19 and 20 March, the group named its 9-member delegation led by the KNU's Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win and includes Vice-Chair of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) Nai Han Thar, Vice-Chief of Staff of the KIA General Gwun Maw, Karenni National Progressive Party (KSPP) Joint-Secretary Shwe Myo Thant, Advisor of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNO) General Khun Oakkar and Dr. Lian Hmung Sakhong from the Chin National Front.²⁶

²⁴ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes National Planning Bill, Union Budget Bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 March 2014 (p. 9)

²⁵ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concludes ninth regular session, stressing great strides in pursuit of peace and prosperity, rule of law – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-27.pdf> (NLM) 27 March 2014 (p. 3)

²⁶ NCCT delegates to draft its version of a nationwide ceasefire – <http://karennews.org/2014/03/ncct-delegates-to-draft-its-version-of-a-nationwide-ceasefire.html/> (Karen News) 27 March 2014

MONGLA TO CALL FOR SELF-ADMINISTERED STATUS

Sources in Mongla, the main base of the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) of Sai Leun, say the group is considering a government-recognized self administered status. “As the main ethnicity in the area, apart from Shan, is Akha, it may be designated as Akha Self Administered Zone (SAZ),” said a source close to the leadership. The NDAA’s domain, according to government specification, covers Mongla Township, Hsaleu and surrounding areas in Mongyang Township and Nampan and surrounding areas in Mongyawng Township.

The National Convention 1993-2007, had stipulated that an ethnic nationality that applies for a self administered status must have the majority population in each of at least two townships that are contiguous. Mongla has already conducted a census in areas under its control. It has not yet disclosed whether the Akha fits with Naypyitaw’s criteria. The other ethnic nationality pushing for a SAZ status is Lahu. The National Convention had dismissed it saying the Lahu did not meet the criteria. Currently there are 5 self administered areas: Danu, Kokang, Palaung, PaO and Wa in the Shan State.²⁷

PRESIDENT’S OFFICE TURNS DOWN REQUEST FOR MEETING WITH POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MYITKYINA

The President’s Office has verbally replied to a letter sent by the Political Prisoners Scrutinizing Committee (PPSC) refusing the committee’s request to meet with 4 political prisoners in Myitkyina jail according to committee member Ye Aung. There are 4 political prisoners who are serving their jail terms in Myitkyina jail, 3 of whom are jailed under Section 17 (1) after being charged with having links to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). In addition, they are facing trial on 2013’s bomb blast cases. “Another prisoner is Moepyar Abbot U Nyanna. This is the third time he is under arrest. We asked for meeting with them so as to know the facts about them,” said Ye Aung, adding that— thanks to the government’s “burning desire” to cooperate—the committee has been able to do the majority of its work successfully. However, when the government granted amnesty to political prisoners at the end of December 2013, it made a blanket declaration that “no more political prisoners remains in jails.” On the contrary, say organizations working on their behalf, political prisoners remain behind bars in Myanmar. “With respect to this matter, it seems the government has assumed that those who remain in jail are not political prisoners based on the Sections under which they’ve been arrested,” Ye Aung said. “But we have designated them as political prisoners. In the time of military rule, especially [during the heyday of the National Intelligence Bureau], political prisoners were jailed under the pretext of various sections. It remains a difficult problem. During this year, the committee’s meetings have been delayed twice.”²⁸

WINNING CANDIDATES FROM 1990 ELECTION MEET FOR 1ST TIME

The winning candidates from the multi-party democratic elections held on 27 May 1990 held their first-ever assembly with a ceremony at in Yangon on 22 March.

Ninety-three political parties took part in the 1990 elections. Of those, 27 parties had at least one candidate elected. The NLD won 392 seats, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) 23 seats, the Rakhine League for Democracy (RLD) 12 seats, the Mon National League for Democracy (MNLD) 5 seats, the Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD) 3 seats, the National Unity Party (NUP) 10 seats and the National Human Rights Democratic Party (NHRD) 3 seats. SNLD chairperson

²⁷ Mongla to call for self-administered status – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5769:mongla-to-call-for-self-administered-status&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) 19 March 2014

²⁸ President’s office turns down request for meeting with political prisoners in Myitkyina – http://elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5510:president-s-office-turns-down-request-for-meeting-with-political-prisoners-in-myitkyina&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 23 March 2014

Khun Tun Oo presided over the meeting together with MP Hla Thein of Tamwe Constituency-1 of Yangon Region and MP Sein Myint of Bogalay Township in the Ayeyarwady Region as masters of ceremonies. Of the 485 candidates elected in 1990, 160 attended the ceremony. No details were available about the number of candidates who have died since the election. Total attendance for the ceremony, including family members and other guests, was 350.²⁹

MYANMAR ELECTION MONITORING NETWORK RECRUITS ELECTION MONITORS

Election monitors are being recruited in Kayah and Shan states as a preparatory measure for the upcoming 2015 general election, according to the Free and Fair Election Monitoring Network (FFEMN). “We are now starting to recruit election monitors in Kayah and Shan states. Our network has already worked with 12 civic organizations. In Kayah and Shan states, the civic organizations are very few compared to other states and regions. That’s why we are aiming for more participation by civil society, which would help guarantee free and fair elections,” said FFEMN member Myo Yan Naung Thein. The network is now implementing the task of gathering election monitors according to a regionally-based system. Moreover, the network is gathering those who want to participate not only as organizations but also as individuals. There are 7 election monitoring organizations from civil society that will work on electoral tasks with the other civic organizations. During the 2010 election, there were no monitors. “Although monitors were present to observe the 2012 by-election, systematic arrangements and cooperation were very uncommon among the voters,” Myo Yan Naung Thein added. “The government will allow observers to monitor the upcoming 2015 election after issuing official identity cards with the aim of holding of 2015 election fairly. The electoral tasks must be carried out by polling station members in accordance with the law, together with the civic organizations,” Tin Aye, chairperson of the Union Election Commission (UEC) said at the coordination meeting between the UEC and civic organizations held on 13 March.³⁰

SUU KYI CALLS ON PUBLIC TO JOIN DEMONSTRATIONS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi held 2 rallies in the town of Mogoke, Mandalay Division, from 22-24 March and called on the public to join nationwide protests in order to demand amendments to Burma’s controversial 2008 Constitution. “Those who say the Constitution does not need to be amended, and that the country is on a path to democracy, are cheating the people,” Suu Kyi told a crowd of around 3,000 people in the ruby mining town of Mogoke on Saturday evening. “There are ... good point and bad points, which need to be amended. We mustn’t say the whole Constitution is good,” she said. Suu Kyi said she would continue this popular drive, adding that Burmese citizens should join in and “be brave, and rid themselves of fear in order to create the country they want.” “I can only depend on people’s power. Amending the Constitution is impossible with just 46 NLD parliamentarians,” she said, referring to the number of seats her opposition party holds in the Union Parliament.

The military-drafted Constitution is widely viewed as being undemocratic and Article 59 (f) of the constitution prevents National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Suu Kyi from becoming president.

The NLD leader has repeatedly called for amendments to the charter, but the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has shown no sign it will cooperate, despite widespread popular support for such changes.³¹

²⁹ Winning candidates from 1990 election meet for first time – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5503:winning-candidates-from-1990-election-meet-for-first-time&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 23 March 2014

³⁰ Myanmar Election Monitoring Network recruits election monitors – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5504:myanmar-election-monitoring-network-recruits-election-monitors&catid=44:national&Itemid=384 (Eleven News Media) 23 March 2014

³¹ Suu Kyi calls on public to join demonstrations for Constitutional reform – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/suu-kyi-calls-public-join-demonstrations-constitutional-reform.html> (Irrawaddy) 24

MYANMAR ENACTS FIRST MEDIA LAW

The Burmese government has enacted its first Media Law that would assure continued freedom currently enjoying by local media, after nearly 5 decades of censorship and harsh restrictions under military rule. The law, drafted by a council of prominent local journalists under the presidential decree in 2012, assures freedom from censorship as part of rights and privileges granted to the local media, while at the same time highlighting ethics and responsibilities to promote quality journalism.

But another law approved by parliament together with the Media Law offsets many of those freedoms, rights and privileges by controlling publication licenses. The government-drafted Printers and Publishers Registration Law states that anyone who wishes to operate a printing machine for mass media or work as a publisher must be licensed by the Information Ministry.

The Media Law states that news publications have the right to be free from censorship, while media personnel have the right to demand information from the government, unless it is classified. Under the law, an independent Press Council, comprised of 15 to 30 members with 3 nominated by the president and the speakers of the two houses of parliament, will be formed to oversee media organizations to ensure quality journalism and to help journalists deal with legal ramifications of their reporting. The Media Law states that journalists accused of violating media ethics may be dealt with by the council instead by law enforcement authorities, with those found guilty fined up to 1 million kyat (about US\$1,000).

However, it also states that publications and journalists accused of instigating religious or communal unrest through their publications may be prosecuted for violating the law. Article 10 of the Printers and Publishers Registration Law specifies that a printer or publisher must not publish articles that could jeopardize national security, rule of law, or community peace and tranquillity. Any publication suspected of violating the clause shall face immediate suspension and could be declared an unlawful publication by the court, it says. Local publishers and journalists have expressed concern over the clause, saying there is no clear definition of how the reports and publications could be interpreted as harmful.³²

FIGHTING RESUMES IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Fighting resumed on 24 March in KIA-controlled area in northern Shan State. A series of battles took place between KIA's 34th Battalion troops and an unknown Burmese army column at Man Yan and Man Hkang area in Momeik Township, northern Shan State on 24 March at 7:50 am and once again at 1 pm. A tense standoff occurred between Kawng Hka militia troops (Kawng Kha Pyi Thu Tsit) and Pan Se militia troops (Pan Se Pyi Thu Tsit) near Old Man Mau village in northern Shan State on 25 March at 4 pm. About 17 Pan Se militia troops led by Kyang Koi Hkying allegedly fired randomly into a roadside gate near Old Man Mau village where seven Kawng Hka soldiers stop trucks and collect money from traders. Both Kawng Hka militia and Pan Se militia group are backed by Burmese army in fight against other ethnic armed groups. According to a source familiar with Burmese army's troop movements, infantry units are commanded by their superiors to launch ground operations to combat illegal logging while expanding their foothold in southern Kachin State. The source said

March 2014/

88 Generation joins rally of 1,000 calling to amend constitution –

http://elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5525:88-generation-joins-rally-of-1-000-calling-to-amend-constitution&catid=52:politics (Eleven News Media) 25 March 2014/

Protestors call to amend constitution in Magway –

http://elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5552:protestors-call-to-amend-constitution-in-magway&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 26 March 2014

³² Myanmar enacts first media law –

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/400496/myanmar-enacts-1st-media-law> (Bangkok Post) 18 March 2014

Burmese army's frontline battalions commanders are warned against contact with KIA troops despite ongoing peace talks between ethnic armed groups and Burmese government.³³

ANALYSIS

During President Thein Sein's 3 years in office there has been a sea-change of political, economic and social reforms. While the country has made some headway in its democratic transition many challenges including the amending the 2008 Constitution, ending ethnic fighting and successful holding of the elections in 2015 remain high on the agenda.

And the recent sectarian unrests in Sittwe on 26 and 27 in Rakhine State stemming from the removal of a Buddhist flag hoisted at the office of an NGO has once again brought to light the sensitive nature on one of the key issues confronting the government. The root causes for the violence are complex and a nuanced understanding of the situation is needed to attain a viable solution.

The recent unrests seems to have gotten out of control again mainly due to the lack of preventative measures adopted by both local and federal authorities. While this is definitely a very complex situation, it would perhaps be helpful if the government could learn from past experiences and responses and find ways to be more proactive to avoid future conflict, which would be a good step forwards in resolving the situation.

Burma is at a critical and as it prepares to host the Asean Chairmanship this year, will become an open display of its progress in implementing democratic reforms and national reconciliation efforts as well as improving its international image. And if the country's leader are fully committed to reform, democracy, national reconciliation and respects the rights of humans, it will need to adopt a genuine resolution where the interests of disenfranchised communities are respected and fully integrated into the process of dialogue.

³³ Battles resume in northern Shan State –
<http://kachinlandnews.com/?p=24290> (KNL) 25 March 2014

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

**JOINT STATEMENT
ISSUED BY
UNION-PEACE MAKING WORKING COMMITTEE AND MONGLA SPECIAL REGION (4)**

1. Both sides will adhere to the agreements that had been reached in Union and State level meetings.
2. Agreement has been reached to step up cooperation in realization of peace and stability and development between the government and Mongla Special Region (4) during the ceasefire period.
3. Both sides agreed to acknowledge the outcomes of series of negotiations and coordination between Union Peace-making Work Committees of the Union Peace-making Central Committee and respective national race armed organizations that led parties concerned to reduce fighting nationwide.
4. It is believed that a nationwide ceasefire is necessary to hold political dialogues for ensuring firm agreements so that eternal peace can truly be achieved.
5. Short after the nationwide ceasefire, it is required to improve socio-economic life of the Union brethren who have been experiencing various kinds of social distress as the country lagged behind in development in a variety of sectors due to decade-long armed conflicts. Cooperation in implementation of such tasks will be carried out with the support of the government, national race leaders, national race organizations and local and foreign individuals and organization.
6. While works are ongoing, political dialogues will be continued to reach a permanent peace by establishing mutual understanding and trust between the two sides.
7. Both sides recognized the need to hold political dialogue that can pave the way for ensuring long-term peace and stability and sustainable development and revitalization of national unity.³⁴

³⁴ Meetings for signing of nationwide ceasefire for permanent peace expected to be held in April – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-03-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 March 2014 (p. 3 & 9)