
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 3

OFFICIAL MEDIA

MYANMAR LEADERS RECEIVE IDEA SECRETARY-GENERAL YVES LETTERME

President Thein Sein held talks with the Secretary-General of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Yves Letterme in Naypyitaw on 21 January and discussed assistance to be provided by the government to the election, preparations made for holding the 2015 election in a free and fair manner and cooperation among the Union Election Commission and civil societies, voters and media. The Secretary-General of the IDEA also called on the Chairman of the Union Election Commission (UEC) U Tin Aye and Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin and exchanged views on issues related to the 2015 general elections, cooperation between the UEC and international community including the EU, IFES and IDEA on voter education and future work plans. Ms. Ashley Pritchard of International IDEA discussed cooperation between the commission and stakeholders for successfully holding the electoral process, conducting workshop and trainings for voter education, cooperation of political parties with the commission with positive attitude, enhancement of capacity of political parties, training for CSO to disseminate voter education to the people, and expression of media without bias meeting international standard. The EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Korbia also requested the Election Commission to provide an invitation letter to allow an EU election monitoring team to Myanmar.¹

MYANMAR-US HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE FRUITFUL: US ASSISTANT SECRETARY

The 2nd Myanmar-US Human Rights Dialogue was held in Naypyitaw from 14 and 15 January 2015 and attended by the Deputy Foreign Minister U Thant Kyaw and U.S. Assistant Secretary of the State, Mr. Tom Malinowski. The two sides discussed ways in which the U.S. could further assist Myanmar's efforts in promoting and protecting human rights and further advance the on-going democratic process in the country. The US delegation welcomed Myanmar's ongoing cooperation with the OHCHR in the field of human rights and its continued negotiation for a mutually acceptable agreement with the OHCHR and encouraged Myanmar to allow the opening of such an office as soon as possible.

They also agreed to continue the productive dialogue on labour rights, reinforcing their engagement with each other, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other governments, under the Initiative to Promote Fundamental Labour Rights and Practices announced in November 2014.

The United States recognized the Myanmar government's efforts to work with the Union Parliament to review and amend the constitution and laws and the two sides agreed that such amendments should be in conformity with national interests and international human rights obligations. The U.S. government also welcomed Myanmar's commitment to hold credible, transparent, and inclusive parliamentary elections in 2015, and Myanmar welcomed United States elections assistance.

Myanmar and the U.S. also agreed on the importance of embracing and promoting Myanmar's cultural and religious diversity, inter-ethnic and interfaith harmony and understanding. They also

¹ Government to provide assistance for holding free and fair election – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 January 2014 (p. 1)/
Union FM receives officials of UN agencies, IDEA Secretary General – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 January 2015 (p. 3)/
UEC Chairman Meets EU Ambassador, officials of International IDEA – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 January 2015 (p. 3)

discussed and agreed that adherence to international humanitarian law is essential to a strong professional military that maintains the trust of the people.

Both governments agreed that respect for human rights, transparent, credible, and inclusive elections, democratic government, and equal protection for all under the law, and broad-based economic development are the bases for strong, stable, peaceful, and prosperous nations. On its part, the United States committed to continue working to end all remaining restrictions on economic, political and military cooperation as Myanmar continues its work to realize this shared vision.²

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 3rd day meeting on 21 January and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- MP Thaw Zin Oo of Magway Region Constituency No.9 asked **if the Tatmadaw intends to return the land area of 450 acres which had been seized by respective commands for security reasons.** Deputy Minister for Defence Major General Kyaw Nyunt said that, **the land in question would not be returned since crops are being cultivated on the lands to provide funds for households and families.** He also said **that the Ministry of Home Affairs had issued land permits for these areas where buildings and offices have been constructed for the families of military staff and command.**
- Regarding the question of MP Mahn Kan Nyunt of Kayin State constituency No.2, Major General Kyaw Nyunt stated that **military staff in remote areas never enjoyed incentive cash and as an alternative an arrangement is made to provide them with extra cash received through their own cultivation and livestock in their respective commands.**³

The 12th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 4th day meeting on 22 January and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- **Regarding the question of compensation to people affected by the construction of the Yangon-Mandalay Highway,** Deputy Minister for Construction U Soe Tint said that **the amount of K1.486 billion had been paid to 976 farmers in recompense for the loss of 2,402.75 acres of their farmland and plans are also underway to compensate over K1.182 billion to 797 farmers in 4 townships of the Nay Pyi Taw Council Area for the loss of 1,864.04 acres of farmland.** The Deputy Minister added **that over K124m has been earmarked for spending on affected farmland in Bago Region and Kyats 10 billion has also been set aside to recompense affected farmers in the regions of Yangon, Bago and Mandalay as well as the Nay Pyi Taw council area for 2015-2016 fiscal year.**⁴

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 2nd day meeting on 20 January and the following issue was discussed at the session.

² Myanmar-US human rights dialogue fruitful: US assistance secretary – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 January 2015 (p. 1)/ Myanmar-US human rights dialogue fruitful: US assistance secretary – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 January 2015 (p. 2)/ Second Myanmar-US Human Rights Dialogue kicks off – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 January 2015 (p. 2)

³ Amyotha Hluttaw discusses land seizure, electoral system – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 January 2015 (p. 2)

⁴ Recompense for farmlands affected by highway construction underway – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 January 2015 (p. 2)

- The Deputy Minister for Communications and Information Technology U Thaung Tin, briefed the session on **the borrowing of 10.500 Billion Yen loan from the Japanese government**. The Deputy Minister explained that **the Japanese loan would be spent on telecommunication infrastructure and upgrading Internet connection in six different categories and added that while mobile telecommunication services are being operated by private companies, the state will operate landline and fax, banking network and special economic zone which need tight security according to international standards.**
- **Regarding the message of President U Thein Sein on membership application of Chemical Weapons Convention**, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Tin Oo Lwin briefed the session that **the country's intention to apply for membership of CWC is a gesture of protection against chemical weapons not only in Asian region, but also to the global community.** The Deputy Minister also said that **membership of the CWC would benefit Myanmar's industrial sector, but also contribute towards global peace.** He added that at present 190 member states have given their consent to be bound by the CWC that Myanmar and Israel have signed but not yet ratified the treaty and 4 states—Angola, North Korea, Egypt, and South Sudan— have not acceded to the treaty. **The session approved the application for membership of the CWC Treaty.** Tin Oo Lwin said **Myanmar has been a signatory to Biological Weapons Convention after the country has submitted applications at Geneva, Switzerland, on 1 December 2014 for membership.**⁵

The 12th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 3rd day meeting on 22 January and discussed the messages of the president on the national education law and six-party talks at the session.

- The Secretary of Joint Bill Committee U Saw Hla Tun read out **the findings of the committee on the messages of the president on the national education law and six-party talks.** The committee recommended amending the national education law, adding that the contents of the message on the law are comprehensive and contribute to stability and peaceful learning environment and the Ministry of Education should come up with the amendment bill as soon as possible.
- Secretary Saw Hla Tun also read out **the response of the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to the president's message on six-party talks.** In his response Speaker Thura Shwe Mann urged the President to hold the **1st round of 6-party talks in order to develop the framework and future tasks of the talks as soon as possible.**
- A member of the joint bill committee also read out **the bill for holding a national referendum for amending the 2008 state constitution and invited representatives to take part in the discussion at next sessions.**⁶

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SHAN, KACHIN LEADERS MEET

Vice President of the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) and Chairman of the 12 armed organization alliances United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) General N. Ban La held a meeting with the leader of the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) Lt-Gen Yawd Serk on 19 January, according to SSA sources.

General N. Ban La then travelled to Chiangmai to attend a 2-day consultation meeting of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) that is negotiating with the government's Union

⁵ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discuss Japanese loans, Chemical Weapons Convention – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 January 2015 (p. 2)

⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses messages of president on national education law – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2015-01-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 January 2015 (p. 2)

Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC) starting from 19 to 20 January. Both the NCCT and UPWC are currently holding talks in drafting the much-awaited Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA). The NCCT is scheduled to meet UPWC's technical team on 21 January.

General Yawd Serk in speaking to local news media said that since he had already signed both the state level and union level ceasefire agreements, the NCA was just another formality. "All the same, we will need to deliberate on the final draft if it includes too many clauses on political issues," he said. "But if it doesn't dwell too much on political matters apart from fully guaranteeing that political dialogues will take place forthwith, we have no problems signing it."⁷

YOUTH DELEGATES DEMAND SEAT AT PEACE TALKS

The vice-chairman of the Union Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC) Aung Min said that he would hold discussions with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) on whether to allow 2 youth representatives to observe the peace talks. Union Ministers Aung Min and Soe Thein, officials of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) and more than 90 representatives from 25 youth organisations met on 18 January in Yangon to discuss the role of young people in the peace process. The youth organisations demanded participation at the next peace talks.

An MPC spokesperson said: "Some political parties and civic society organisations demanded access to the next peace and ceasefire talks as observers. There must be room for young people in the peace process. The current talks have lasted three years. Young people are not represented in the effort to sign a nationwide ceasefire deal. The MPC can't make the decision. Only the government side and the ethnic groups can decide that."

A representative from a youth organisation said: "We demanded the right to attend the talks as observers while meeting representatives of the NCCT. The NCCT replied that it needed to seek the approval of the UPWC." Aung Min said: "The youth groups can choose two young people and then we will sign it. After that I will discuss it with the NCCT." The youth delegates also demanded that military representatives from the UPWC be allowed in the next meetings with the UPWC. Aung Min replied that he would try to arrange it.⁸

UNA AND NLD MEET FOR TALKS

The National League for Democracy (NLD) and the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), an alliance of ethnic political parties met on 18 January in Naypyitaw and discussed 3 main issues focussed on holding political dialogue, amendment and or redrafting of the 2008 Constitution as well as the successful holding of free and fair elections. The meeting was attended by 8 central executive committee members of the NLD led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and 5 leaders from the UNA alliance.

Head of Office of the UNA Min Pe Than said: "After our leaders meet up again to discuss the details of these three points we will make a statement." General Secretary of the Mon National Party Dr. Min Soe Lin said: "All the issues we discussed [at the meeting between the NLD and the UNA] will be discussed at a [future] UNA meeting and the NLD will also discuss them [amongst themselves]. Both sides' working committees will then make compromises."

Before the 1990 elections the UNA consisted of 12 ethnic party members, all of whom contested the 1990 election. Some of those parties were abolished by the military government following the 1990 elections and some closed down.

⁷ Shan, Kachin leaders meet –

<http://english.panglong.org/shan-kachin-leaders-meet/> (Shan Herald News Agency) 23 January 2015

⁸ Youth delegates demand seat at peace talks –

http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8727:youth-delegates-demand-seat-at-peace-talks&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 19 January 2015

The UNA alliance has 7 members including the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), the Mon National Party (MNP), the Rakhine National Party (RNP), the Shan State Kokant Democratic Party (SSKDP), the Kayan National Party, the Kayin National Party (KNP) and the Kachin National Democratic Network (KNDN).⁹

MSF RESUMES WORK IN ARAKAN STATE AFTER GOVT BAN

The international medical group Médecins Sans Frontières-Holland (MSF) has resumed work in Rakhine State after a 9-month government ban on its presence in one of the poorest parts of the country over allegations of bias. The group on Tuesday 20 January said that it was allowed to resume work on 17 December in Rakhine State, where it has provided health and emergency assistance since 1992.

The government ordered the MSF out of Rakhine in February 2014 after the group said it had treated people it believed were victims of sectarian violence. The government denied an attack had taken place and accused MSF of being biased in favour of members of the minority Muslim Rohingya community. Aid groups have drawn the ire of some Buddhists who accuse them of favouring the Rohingya. Humanitarian groups reject accusations of bias in favour of Muslims.

MSF Burma operational adviser Martine Flokstra said in statement, “We hope to continue this dialogue with the authorities to ensure that those who need it most in Rakhine State are able to access the healthcare they need.” The organization said that since restarting its clinics last month, it had done more than 3,480 consultations, mostly with people with diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and chronic conditions.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

The visit and discussions between Myanmar leaders and the Secretary-General of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Yves Letterme shows the seriousness and commitment of the authorities in Naypyitaw in holding the elections later this year. The promise by the Union Election Commission that the polls would be free and fair is also indeed a welcome development though it is far too early to predict the outcome and whether the UEC adheres and delivers on its words remains to be seen. Key issues on Constitutional Amendment and signing of a National Ceasefire Accord (NCA) still remain unresolved and pending. At such a time, the call urging the government for the inclusion of youth representatives at future peace talks is a step in the right direction and has initially been accepted in principal by the government’s chief peace negotiator Minister Aung Min. President Thein Sein in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2014 stated that “Myanmar’s future depends on the 16 million youth population and that the youth play a crucial role in democratic reform process.” And if the President is true to his words, the inclusion of youth representatives at future peace talks should be welcomed. While the current peace talks have made progress it has not been able to prevent outbreaks of clashes between government forces and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and this has been due partly to the absence of a military code of conduct. The peace process in Myanmar is indeed a crucial component of the on-going democratic reforms and without lasting peace any future government will have difficulty in maintaining political stability. Myanmar’s past history has shown that there is no guarantee that the current peace process can be preserved and maintained on the long-run. And it therefore is important for all stakeholders to understand and to seize the opportunity even if all their concerns and demands are not being met in its entirety.

⁹ UNA and NLD Meet for Talks –

<http://monnews.org/2015/01/20/una-nld-meet-talks/> (IMNA) 20 January 2015

¹⁰ MSF Resumes Work in Arakan State After Govt Ban –

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/msf-resumes-work-arakan-state-govt-ban.html> (Irrawaddy) 22 January 2015