

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 2

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ADDRESSES UNION PARLIAMENT

President Thein Sein in his address to the 40th meeting of the 13th session of the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw on 28 January said his government has laid down a good foundations for strengthening democracy in Myanmar. He called on outgoing lawmakers to work together with the next government and pledged that members of the outgoing government would cooperate with the new government to bring peace and development to the country. The President hailed the achievements of his five-year term and said, "Whatever has been done during the past five years is aimed at the restoration of peace and tranquillity before 2015, ensuring the effectuation of a mechanism that will allow political forces to participate in the political process, promoting the socio-economic status of the people and widening the scope of knowledge on the part of the people," he said. "We have never thought of which party will win the 2015 election. [The country's prosperity] is, in fact, a broader and higher objective, regardless of having hope for a second term for me or for my party. This is a national objective, much nobler than individual or group interest. This objective is important to strengthen democracy in Myanmar," the President said. He added that to achieve success in democratisation, the outgoing government met with successes and challenges, as well as confrontations and conflicts, he said. "However, we've managed to push the democratisation process forward, and not to regress to conditions of the past, within the framework permitted by the political situation," he said. He also pledged for a systematic handover of the duties of the government and presidency to the next government. At the time when the government started to implement the democratic transition, Arab nations in the Middle East started their own drives toward democratisation, known as Arab Spring. Over the last five years, the Arab nations are getting further and further from reaching their original goal of democracy," he added. The 2010 election was considered as the initial step on the path to democratisation in Myanmar, and the 2015 election was a further step along the same path, the President said.¹

PYIDAUNGSSU HLUTTAW ENDS DEBATE ON THE PRESIDENT'S SECURITY BILL

The 13th Regular session of the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw concluded its discussions on two bills, including the Former Presidents' Security Bill, which the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) debated on 28 January. MPs held discussions on the Former Presidents' Security Bill in an effort to end the debate between the two Hluttaws on the bill. The bill was subsequently approved in accordance with the laws and regulations of the parliament. MP Thein Tun Oo of Amarapura Constituency read out the Joint Bill Committee's report on the Condominium Law, which was sent back by the president with remarks. Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann sought parliamentary approval on the bill and approved it in accordance with the laws and regulations of the parliament. On the president's proposal to merge the Ministry for Immigration and Population and the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Joint Bill Committee voted against the move, deciding such a move would be more appropriately carried out by the next government.²

PYITHU HLUTTAW (LOWER HOUSE) CONCLUDES FINAL SESSIION

The first Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) concluded its 13th session in Nay Pyi Taw on 28 January. Deputy Speaker Nanda Kyaw Swar called on lawmakers to carry on their contributions to the development of

¹ Our government will cooperate with the next government: President U Thein Sein – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 January 2016 (p. 1 & 3)

² Pyidaungsu Hluttaw ends debate on Former Presidents' Security Bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 January 2016 (p. 2)

the country by making the best use of their knowledge and experiences gained during their five-year term in the outgoing parliament. Lawmakers from ethnic parties and representatives of the Tatmadaw also extended greetings at yesterday's parliament session. In his concluding remarks, Speaker Thura Shwe Mann hailed the achievements in the five-term of the Pyithu Hluttaw, referring to discussions on national reconciliation, the rule of law and peace. He also expressed thanks to the lawmakers, acknowledging that they were able to exchange views on different issues, including the unity of all people in Myanmar.³

FIRST AMYOTHA HLUTTAW SESSION CONCLUDES

The first Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) session concluded its session on 28 January in which members of Union-level organisations responded to questions raised by parliamentarians. Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population Win Myint responded to a question raised by MP Tin Maung Win of Mandalay Region Constituency 3 on whether there are plans to conduct a census on the Lisu population in Mandalay Region. The deputy minister replied that data on the Lisu population in Mandalay Region would be announced when approval is given after coordination between the departments and organisations concerned. He also said the data would come from the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. There are no new plans to conduct a census on the Lisu population in the region, he added.⁴

C-IN-C, SUU KYI TALK PEACE

Defence Services Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met with National League for Democracy Chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi at the Bayintnaung Guest House in Nay Pyi Taw on 25 January and discussed matters relating to the post-election transitional period, peace and stability, parliamentary affairs, the formation of the next government and the peace process as laid out by the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.⁵

GOV'T, NLD HOLD SECOND MEETING ON HANDING OVER OF HEAD OF STATE'S DUTY

The second coordination meeting on the handing over of the duty of the Head of State between the government's supporting committee and the National League for Democracy's committee took place in Nay Pyi Taw on 26 January. Both sides held discussions on the planned agenda for holding a ceremony to transfer the duty of the Head of State and ongoing ministerial works, bilateral cooperation in the matter and decided to hold a third meeting in February. The second coordination was attended by the government's supporting committee Chairman Minister Hla Tun accompanied by Union Minister Ye Htut, Director-General of the President Office U Hla Tun, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Construction Maung Ohn and the Director of the President Office Zaw Htay. The NLD's committee was led by its chairman Win Htein and NLD member's Dr Myo Aung and Dr Aung Thu.⁶

PRISONERS RELEASED IN AMNESTY DEAL TO MARK SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF FIRST UNION PEACE CONFERENCE

One hundred and two prisoners were granted their freedom in honour of the successful completion of the first Union Peace Conference on 22 January, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs. One

³ Pyithu Hluttaw concludes final session –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 January 2016 (p. 2)

⁴ First Amyotha Hluttaw session concludes –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 January 2016 (p. 2)

⁵ C-in-C, Suu Kyi talk peace –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 January 2016 (p. 2)

⁶ Gov't, NLD hold second meeting on handing over of Head of State's duty –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-27-red.pdf> (GNLM) 27 January 2016 (p. 3)

foreign prisoner was among the prisoners released in an amnesty in accord with the sub-section (a) of the section 204 of the Constitution. The foreign prisoner was released in view of maintaining bilateral friendship and relations, said the ministry.⁷

VP DR SAI MAUK KHAM ADDRESSES CONCLUSION OF UNION PEACE CONFERENCE

Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham addressed a handover ceremony of a set of discussions compiled at the country's first Union Peace Conference at Myanmar International Convention Centre-2 in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 January. In his address the Vice-President said that peaceful exchange of views on five agenda items at the five-day political dialogue demonstrated that trust has been built among stakeholder groups who have differences while the country is moving towards democracy. Compared to international incidences of peace making, the country's political transformation and peace-making processes are working within a short period of time, said the Vice-President. He cited successful implementation of the processes as the first reasons for the President's attitude towards the concept that democracy is impossible without peace and internal peace cannot be achieved without democracy and the second reason for creating mutual trust through the new political culture based on negotiation. He went on to say that discussions on topics at the UPC will be documented and brought into the future peace conference, hoping for better outcome to be produced in the time of the new government. In his conclusion, the Vice-President called for making great strides in building a democratic federal Union that can ensure peace and prosperity and equality for further generations. During the final day of the conference 15 representatives on behalf of 7 stakeholder groups submitted a set of discussions on the given agenda items— political, economic, social issues, security and land and environment to the conference for approval. The following is the four-point proposal approved by the First Union Peace Conference.

1. To exert effort to finish the national-level political dialogues and the union peace conference successfully within three to five years to be able to reach the union agreement;
2. To convene the second union peace conference as soon as possible at an appropriate time;
3. To enable at least 30 per cent participation by women at different levels of political dialogues according to the political dialogue framework of nation-wide ceasefire agreement (NCA); and
4. To put on record and honour those who have participated in the nation-wide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and the Union Peace Conference.⁸

NEW MILITARY MPS APPOINTED

The Union Election Commission issued notifications 1/2016, 2/2016 and 3/2016, announcing the appointment of military MPs to the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and Region and State hluttaws in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law, Amyotha Hluttaw Election Law and Divisional Region/State Hluttaw Election Law, as well with Article 31 of the aforementioned laws. A total of 110 military MPs have been appointed to the Pyithu Hluttaw, along with 56 to the Amyotha Hluttaw, 13 to the Kachin State, 5 in Kayah State, 6 in Kayin State, 6 in Chin State, 25 in Sagaing Region, 7 in Taninthayi Region, 19 in Bago Region, 17 in Magway Region, 19 in Mandalay Region, 8 in Mon State, 12 in Rakhine State, 31 in Yangon Region, 34 in Shan State and 18 in Ayeyawady Region.⁹

⁷ Prisoners released in amnesty deal to mark successful completion of first Union Peace Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-23.pdf> (GNLM) 23 January 2016 (p. 1)

⁸ VP Dr Sai Mauk Kham addresses conclusion of Union Peace Conference – http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/17_Jan_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 17 January 2016 (p. 1)

⁹ New military MPs Appointed – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-01-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 January 2016 (p. 3)

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DEADLY CLASHES REPORTED BETWEEN TA'ANG AND SSA-S FORCES

Deadly clashes have broken out between the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in northern Shan State, according to a spokesperson for the Palaung armed group. Three TNLA soldiers died and two were wounded after fighting, which first broke out on 17 January, according to Mai Ai Kyaw, a spokesperson for the Ta'ang group. He said the conflict had occurred in Kyaukme, Hsipaw and Namhsan Townships in northern Shan State. "We clashed because RCSS [Restoration Council of Shan State] troops trespassed on our territory. Clashes will end if the RCSS go back to their territory in southern Shan State," Mai Ai Kyaw said. The Ta'ang spokesperson claimed that the SSA-S, the armed wing of the RCSS, had sought to claim new territory since signing the so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in mid-October. He also alleged that Burma Army troops had supported the Shan armed group in recent fighting. In late November, the TNLA also claimed that their troops had clashed with a joint force of SSA-S and Burma Army troops on multiple occasions in Namhkam and Manton townships, near the border with China.

On the recent hostilities, Lt-Col Sai Mein, a SSA-S spokesperson, said his group was not the aggressor but had defended itself against a surprise TNLA attack. "Clashes broke out as the TNLA ambushed our military columns on their way back to stations from our headquarters. We don't understand why they launched an attack on us," Sai Mein said. The spokesperson also refuted allegations the Shan armed group was being supported by Burma's military. He said the area of recent clashes was formerly controlled by the Shan State National Army and that SSA-S troops have been present there for some time. In an interview with local news media last month, RCSS chairman Lt-Gen Yawd Serk also rejected claims of cooperation with the Burma Army as "totally false." The SSA-S was one of eight non-state armed groups that inked the NCA last year. Several other major ethnic armed groups opted against signing, chiefly on the grounds that three armed groups, including the TNLA, were excluded from the agreement.¹⁰

DKBA SPLINTER GROUP, GOVT ARMY AND ALLIED BGF CLASH IN KAREN STATE

Fighting flared again on 26 January in Kawkareik Township, Karen State, where a breakaway DKBA faction accused a joint force comprising the Burma Army and Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) of burning down at least 10 houses in the village of Pyar Pin a day earlier. Clashes broke out after 1 pm local time, according to Col. Nai Maung Zaw from the government-allied Karen BGF. Conflict first erupted on 23 January in the same area, pitting the splinter DKBA faction against the joint pro-government force. The Karen BGF colonel said no soldiers from his side were wounded in the fighting, but acknowledged that troops from the joint force did burn down some huts in Pyar Pin village on 25 January - "We did not burn down the houses of civilians. We burned some huts where their [the DKBA splinter faction] leaders stayed. They spread propaganda saying we burned down civilians' homes," said Nai Maung Zaw.

The breakaway DKBA faction goes by the identical acronym, but beginning this year reverted to the DKBA's original name, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, after its leadership was purged from the "Benevolent" incarnation of DKBA last year. The "Benevolent" DKBA is led by Gen. Saw Lah Pwe, who expelled Col. Saw Kyaw Thet and Col. Saw San Aung from the ranks of his army following fighting between DKBA and government troops along the Asia Highway last year. Saw Lah Pwe's DKBA replaced "Buddhist" with "Benevolent" in 2012 to reflect the armed group's secular nature. The breakaway

¹⁰ Deadly Clashes Reported Between Ta'ang and SSA-S Forces – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/deadly-clashes-reported-between-taang-and-ssa-s-forces.html> (the Irrawaddy) 20 January 2016

faction involved in conflict with the government this week is believed to number some 100 men, who were formerly part of the DKBA's Klo Htoo Wah tactical group. The group fired artillery shells into a base of Burma Army Light Infantry 97 in Kawkareik Township's Kaw Moo village, according to a member of the group. A statement from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army issued on 25 January said no one from its ranks was wounded in the 23 January flare-up, but claimed two members of the Karen BGF were injured in the fighting. "Their troop members were wounded in the fighting. Therefore, they were angry and then they burned down about 10 houses in the village where we were fighting," said Capt. Ye Htet from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army.¹¹

ANP IN TENSE STANDOFF WITH NLD OVER STATE GOVERNANCE

Politicians in Arakan State are butting heads over a forthcoming chief ministerial appointment, as the date draws nearer for the transfer of power to a newly elected government. The National League for Democracy (NLD), which won a landslide victory in the 8 November nationwide poll, has stated its intention to appoint members from within the party to the top executive posts in all of Burma's states and divisions. The announcement was not well received in Arakan State, the only administrative region where an ethnic political party fared better than the NLD. The Arakan National Party (ANP), which won a majority of elected state and Union-level seats representing its constituencies, now vows to stand in firm opposition to the new government if denied the right to form its own state-level administration. In a statement dated 19 January, the ANP announced that it "won't join any government organization, but stand as an opposition party for the interests of Arakan people," unless it is granted an exemption and allowed to form its own government. NLD central committee member Nyi Pu met with locals and civil society organizations in the state capital Sittwe, where he faced renewed calls for the party to make an exception for the ANP, as the party won about 67 percent of elected seats in the state legislature. According to ANP central committee member Khine Pyi Soe, Nyi Pu reiterated the NLD's position that the ruling party would select the state's leadership and that the decision came from party chairwoman Aung San Suu Kyi. Tension is expected to mount as new lawmakers assume their seats next month, as the ANP has thus far only become more resolute in its demand. The party stated in its announcement on Tuesday that it would be open to discussions with the NLD should they wish to discuss the formation of the new state government.¹²

USDP LEADERS DENY RUMOURS OF PARTY SPLIT

Some members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party's top leadership on 19 January denied rumours that the party had split into two factions or that individuals had been removed. USDP party co-chair Htay Oo, said "official notification" would be sent out in the event that someone was removed from the party. "The rumoured removal of some members is not true. Moreover, the USDP has not split into two factions. It is just a rumour," said Htay Oo. Amyotha Hluttaw MP Khin Shwe said he had been removed from the USDP, although he later acknowledged that he had not received official notification. Aung Thein Lin, a former member of the party's central committee, backed up Htay Oo's point about official notification. "The party needs to send notification to those who have been ousted. I want to say that our party has not removed any members," Aung Thein Lin said. "Central members are elected once every five years, according to party policy. No members have been removed so far. Even I heard that Khin Shwe had been ousted, but no official notification has been sent to him."

Rumours that the USDP had split into two factions were exacerbated by the observation that some members openly sported the party brooch, while others did not. Htay Oo said the party has not

¹¹ DKBA Splinter Group, Govt Army and Allied BGF Clash in Karen State – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/dkba-splinter-group-govt-army-and-allied-bgf-clash-in-karen-state.html> (the Irrawaddy) 26 January 2016

¹² ANP in Tense Standoff with NLD Over State Governance – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/anp-in-tense-standoff-with-nld-over-state-governance.html> (the Irrawaddy) 20 January 2016

released any directives about whether or not to wear the brooches, adding that he has questions about who might have started the rumour about the party split. Win Oo, Pyithu Hluttaw MP for Yehyu township, Tanintharyi Region, said, “Many of us stopped wearing the party brooches because we felt sorry about losing the election.”¹³

OBJECTION TO NLD MANDALAY SHAN AFFAIRS MINISTER DISMISSED

An attempt to unseat an elected National League for Democracy representative due to questions over his ethnicity has failed. A tribunal formed by the Union Election Commission dismissed the objection on 20 January. The case was opened after a rival candidate for the Shan ethnic minister seat in Mandalay accused the NLD’s Sai Kyaw Zaw of not being eligible for the position on the grounds that he is not an ethnic Shan. According to the UEC office in Mandalay, the commission had originally rejected Sai Kyaw Zaw’s candidacy since his national registration card lists “Bamar and Buddhist” under race and religion. But he filed an appeal to the UEC and was permitted to contest the November 8 election, which he won. After the results were announced, defeated candidate Sai Naw Khe filed the complaint that could have unseated his rival. Sai Naw Khe said it wasn’t bitter grapes but moral obligation that drove his protestation. “My objection was not about my personal feeling but about following the law,” he said. Sai Naw Khe has until 4 February to file an appeal against the tribunal’s decision.¹⁴

SSPP TO WORK FOR DEMOCRATIC FEDERAL UNION OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT

The Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) 2015 Central Committee plenum has passed a six-point resolution included a goal of working to establish a genuine democratic federal union by means outside of Parliament. The plenum, held from 4 to 17 January and discussed the ongoing ceasefire and peace process and other resolutions. SSPP spokesman Maj. Sai Suu said, “We released our statement expressing our resolution for establishing a genuine democratic federal union by means of outside parliament. Now we are working in the principle of mutual withdrawals of our troops from our frontline positions with the government.” The statement says SSPP will work through non-military means to cooperate with government, Tatmadaw (Defense Services), Parliament, political parties and other organizations for the emergence of genuine democratic federal union. The resolution pledged to work on narcotic drug eradication and on repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of war refugees.

The SSPP and government withdrew their troops from frontline positions in 2015, but assistance for rehabilitation of war refugees is still needed. “We badly need emergency assistance for war refugees as all of their crops have been lost in monsoon during the past 2-3 months. We have to negotiate with the government on that issue. And then we have to build houses for their resettlement and rehabilitation,” he said. He said that there were more than 1,000 refugees in Hai Par refugee camp and 300 refugees were still in the Wan Wa refugee camp. The resolution also emphasized unity among ethnic Shan nationalities. This plenum was attended by 156 members.¹⁵

UEC CHAIRMAN, SUU KYI DISCUSS ELECTORAL BODY’S WORK

Burma’s outgoing Union Election Commission (UEC) chair discussed some of the body’s shortcomings over the past five years in his meeting with National League for Democracy (NLD) chairwoman Aung

¹³ USDP leaders deny rumours of party split – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/18549-usdp-leaders-deny-rumours-of-party-split.html> (Myanmar Times) 20 January 2016

¹⁴ Objection to NLD Mandalay Shan Affairs minister dismissed – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/mandalay-upper-myanmar/18606-objection-to-nld-ethnic-minister-dismissed.html> (Myanmar Times) 22 January 2016

¹⁵ SSPP to work for democratic federal union outside parliament – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/sspp-work-democratic-federal-union-outside-parliament> (Mizzima) 20 January 2016

San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw on 26 January. The UEC Chair said, “We were weak in giving voter education at ward and village level though we did well at township level.” He said sub-commissions had also faced various difficulties, including securing office space, and had to seek help from government ministries. Tin Aye also relayed some of the tasks of the commission going forward. “The voter lists which are saved on the main server need to be updated each 6 months,” the chairman said, adding that he would offer suggestions for the amendment of election laws and by-laws for the new parliament.¹⁶

ANALYSIS

The meeting between the Commander-in-Chief Ming Aung Hlaing and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi is a reflection on the status of play to unfold in Myanmar in the coming years. The NLD while having the chance to form the next government will need to count on the support and cooperation of the military if its tenure in office is to be successful. While the details of the meeting between the two leaders remain undisclosed, it is a clear sign that both the NLD and the military (Tatmadaw) will need to work together in resolving and implementing democratic reforms as well as addressing sensitive issues including the on-going peace process. Myanmar is set to embark on a new chapter in its history and in the coming months to usher in the first democratically elected government in nearly half a century. That being said, the country’s past history should not and cannot be erased and the realisation that the role of the military in the running of the country will not be changed overnight and that cooperation and mutual respect between the NLD and the military will be crucial. The continued clashes between ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) does not bode well for the peace process and once again emphasizes that the NLD led government will need to adopt and implement clear policies but more importantly seek to establish good relations with all stakeholders and prove to the people that it can deliver on its election promises.

¹⁶ UEC Chairman, Suu Kyi Discuss Electoral Body’s Work – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/uec-chairman-suu-kyi-discuss-electoral-bodys-work.html> (the Irrawaddy) 27 January 2016