
POLITICAL MONITOR NO.9

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT GRANTS AMNESTY TO 83 PRISONERS

President Htin Kyaw granted a general amnesty to 83 prisoners - 75 men and 8 women from 25 correctional facilities - on 16 April, as part of its commitment to national reconciliation. according to an announcement released. They were released under Order 33/2016 of the President's Office, according to Article 204, Sub-article (a) of the constitution. The amnesty came 8 days after the Office of the State Counsellor hinted at the release of more prisoners of conscience and political activists. The office issued an announcement on 7 April, vowing its continued efforts to free political prisoners, political activists and students on trial. 161 men, 36 women and two children were released on 8 April - 11 men and 5 women were released from Insein Correctional Facility, 7 men from Pyi Correctional Facility, 5 men from Pakokku Correctional Facility, 7 men from Zinkyaik Correctional Facility, 4 men from Mandalay Correctional Facility and 2 women from Htonebo Correctional Facility.¹

FOREIGN MINISTER SUU KYI MEETS FOREIGN DIPLOMATS

Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi at a meeting with diplomats on 22 April in Nay Pyi Taw stressed the importance of people-to-people engagement regarding the formulation of foreign policy, saying that the best relations between different countries can be fostered by the peoples of those countries. The Minister said the government would adopt a people centered policy, emphasizing the relations between the peoples of nations, creating friendly and cooperative relations between them. Clarifying the country's foreign policy, she recalled that since the country regained independence in 1948 it has adopted an independent, non-aligned and active foreign policy direction, dealing closely and warmly with not only neighboring countries but also the nations of the world. Minister Suu Kyi also pledged that Myanmar would actively participate in regional and international arena while working for its development. Regarding the approach to issues in the world, Myanmar will be able to approach problems with sincerity, goodwill and genuine friendship despite not being a powerful country, she said. She emphasized the strategic location of Myanmar in Southeast Asia and South Asia, as the country is geopolitically important despite being faced with many challenges. The government is trying to build the country to be as strong as possible, taking into consideration the people of the union as a source of strength. "Economic development and social development can come only if the people become actively involved in building up a nation," she said, "we, our government, cannot do it on our own without the participation of the people." She also stressed the importance of diplomacy, saying that diplomats must ensure that people get to know one another in a friendly and cooperative way, adding that diplomacy is the ability to make differences to come together for the harmony of all. Asked about the money laundering issue in Myanmar, the Minister replied that the government is combating money laundering in all aspects, pledging that the government would take further action to eliminate any and all money laundering in the country. The meeting by Aung San Suu Kyi with foreign diplomats in her capacity as foreign minister is the first after the new National League for Democracy (NLD) government took office on 1 April.²

¹ President grants amnesty to 83 prisoners –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/18_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 April 2016 (p. 1)/
Presidential pardon given to 83 prisoners on Myanmar New Year Day –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/17-4-2016.pdf> (GNLM) 17 April 2016 (p. 1)

² Strength of the People: Myanmar to be made strong by using the strength of the people to push foreign policy –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/23_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 23 April 2016 (p. 1)

CABINET REFORM TO BE COMPLETED EARLIER THAN EXPECTED

Union Minister at the President's Office Aung San Suu Kyi said on 21 April that the reformation of government ministries is expected to be completed earlier than expected, calling for speedy efforts to complete the process. "Though the outline of the new government's ministerial reformation plan was estimated to take one or two months, it has been encouraging to see that the reformation process has reached a certain extent," said the Minister. The quick reorganization will work fast, she added. Speaking at the coordination meeting on the reorganization of ministries at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw, the State Counsellor also urged Union Ministers to make suggestions and pool ideas and to coordinate with ministries that were not present at the meeting, stressing that it is necessary to be flexible in the reformation. President Htin Kyaw formed the new government with 21 trimming the 36 ministries of the previous government. The reformed ministry includes a new Ministry of Ethnic Affairs. According to the constitution, the Ministries of Home Affairs, Border Affairs and Defence are run by the Myanmar Defence Services.³

PRESIDENT HTIN KYAW SENDS NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Myanmar President Htin Kyaw sent a New Year message to the Myanmar people and wished the entire nation for their physical and mental well-being. The President said that he would strive for the release of political prisoners, political activists and students facing political charges and are using the means as prescribed in the constitution and criminal procedures to lift these sentences and to acquit them. He also stated that his government's efforts to implement policies as national reconciliation, internal peace, emergence of a constitution that aims to establish a democratic federal union and the promotion of the social life of our people for the sake of the country, and asked for the voting public, to actively continue to co-operate in your respective sectors, to criticize and point out the discrepancies and fallacies, and to make suggestions wherever necessary. The President also expressed his welcome to the government led by Aung San Suu Kyi as it assumes the duties of State. *(Please see Appendix A for full text of President Htin Kyaw's New Year Message).*⁴

STATE COUNSELLOR THANKS PUBLIC FOR SERVICE DURING THINGYAN

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, released a message of appreciation to the people on Myanmar in honor of New Year's Day on 17 April. In her message, she thanked civil service personnel for their excellent performance of duties during the water festival, as well as the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and members of the public. She also thanked military personnel for maintaining security during the water festival in both far-flung areas and towns and villages, enabling the public to enjoy freely and happily. She also expressed her heart-felt thanks to the police, including the traffic police, for their efforts to reduce outbreaks of crime and to ensure peace, stability and safe, smooth travel during the water festival. She also commended health personnel for providing of 24-hour health care. Suu Kyi offered special thanks to employees of local development committees, fire brigades, Red Cross societies, youth associations, volunteer organizations and CSOs for the good will they showed by keeping the environment clean, providing emergency assistance, donating blood, helping to find missing people and transporting injured people to hospitals. The State Counsellor also expressed her delight to see people preserving Myanmar traditions, behaving in a proper manner in throwing water and performing meritorious deeds. In her conclusion, the State Counsellor credited all Myanmar

³ Speedy Shuffle: Cabinet reform to be completed earlier than expected – http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/22_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 22 April 2016 (p. 1)

⁴ New Mindset for 1378: Continue to co-operate with us, countrymen – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/17-4-2016.pdf> (GNLM) 17 April 2016 (p. 1& 3)

citizens and requested that they continue to cooperate in years to come. *(Please Appendix B for full text of statement of the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's New Year Message).*⁵

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION DUTIES ASSIGNED TO DIRECTOR-LEVEL SERVICE PERSONNEL

Director-level service personnel have been appointed deputy commissioners for district administration by the new government, according to a staff officer of the General Administration Department. The deputy commissioner posts were assigned to deputy directors in the time of the previous government, said the staff officer, adding that they were appointed the heads of township GADs now according to the article 288 of the Constitution, administration of district and township level shall be assigned to the civil services personnel. The previous government created supporting committees in districts and townships while promising that they were vesting the responsibility of the administration of districts or townships in civil service personnel in accordance with the Constitution. Supporting committees were not working successfully as no power was vested in the committees; it has been reported by the new government. In the final monthly radio speech by the former President he called for amendments to the Constitution to ensure public participation in the country's lower-level administration mechanism.⁶

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

GENERAL SAW MO SHAY APPOINTED AS NEW DKBA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

General Saw Mo Shay has been officially appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) following the death of the former DKBA General Saw Lah Pwe. The appointment was made during an emergency meeting of DKBA commanders held at Sone See Myaing from 19 to 21 April. Colonel Saw Soe Myint, a DKBA commander who attended the meeting said: "The Commander-in-Chief is the former Deputy Commander-in-Chief. This is fixed. The Commander-in-Chief will continue to make things better in line with the directives set down by Phoo Lah Pwe (Saw Lah Pwe)." Over 70 military leaders attended the three-day emergency DKBA commanders' meeting and they all unanimously agreed to appoint Saw Mo Shay as the new DKBA Commander-in-Chief. Quarter-Master General Saw Isaac from the Karen National Union (KNU) told KIC he believes that the KNU will have no problems carrying out joint tasks with the DKBA after General Saw Mo Shay's appointment. Commander Brig-Gen Saw Steel, the DKBA No. 1 Military Operations Commander was also promoted to DKBA Deputy Commander-in-Chief at the commanders' meeting.⁷

SSA-N: BURMA ARMY DEMANDS WITHDRAWAL FROM STRATEGIC OUTPOSTS

The Burma Army has threatened renewed military offensives if the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-N) refuses to withdraw from two mountain posts bordering ethnic Wa territory, according to local sources. A sergeant from the SSA-N told local news media that his armed group would not abandon these northern Shan State posts and that they would defend their territory in the event of a strike by government forces. "We have two brigades there," the officer said. "We have no conditions under which we would withdraw from our posts because this was our area and we have been based here for a long time. We are prepared to fight if they take action." The warning to withdraw came in the form of a letter from the Burma Army's Northeastern Command in Shan State's northern city of Lashio, just before the annual water festival last week, the sergeant said. He expressed

⁵ State Counsellor thanks public for service during Thingyan –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/18_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 April 2016 (p. 3)

⁶ District administration duties assigned to director-level service personnel –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/23_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 23 April 2016 (p. 2)

⁷ DKBA appoints new Commander-in-Chief –
<http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/dkba-appoints-new-commander-chief> (Mizzima) 22 April 2016

concern that the Burma Army might be planning an operation on a larger scale. “We are even worried about whether they will attack our other bases, not only these two mountain posts,” he added.

The two small bases in question straddle territory controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and are located in the Loi Lan and Loi Say hills near the Salween River in Tanyang Township. The location is a half-day’s travel from the SSPP/SSA-N headquarters in central Shan State’s Wan Hai, and has been scouted as a potential location for a larger Shan base. The area is strategic for both the SSA-N—thought to be an ally of the Wa army—and the Burma Army, who, some speculate, would prefer to defeat the UWSA, Burma’s largest ethnic armed organization.

It is not the first time that the Burma Army has demanded that the SSPP/SSA-N withdraw from their posts or face an offensive from government forces. The last attack against the Shan armed group began under similar circumstances just two days after the nationwide election held in November 2015, when the military called for a retreat of the SSA-N from posts outside of Wan Hai. Fighting continued for months, displacing thousands of villagers in central Shan State. Citing a lack of inclusivity, the SSPP/SSA-N opted out of becoming a signatory to Burma’s so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA), signed by the previous government and 8 of the country’s more than 20 ethnic armed groups last October.

As a new National League for Democracy-led (NLD) administration finds its bearings, ethnic armed leaders expect that a new round of peace talks will begin soon. “We are waiting to see how much the military will cooperate with the new government while the new government is calling for peace and reconciliation,” said Col Pein from the SSPP/SSA-N Pa earlier this month. The Burma Army has continued to fight other NCA non-signatory groups, including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) near Laiza in nearby Kachin State, allegedly seizing three of the KIA’s mountain posts, according to recent reports by the local news groups. Another large offensive has been launched in Shan State by government forces against the ethnic Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Since March, clashes have occurred in Namkham, Namhsan, Kutkai and Kyaukme townships. Ethnic Palaung (Ta’ang) rights groups have reported arbitrary detainment of locals, as well as torture and forced portering in areas where the Burma Army is active. According to a statement issued by the TNLA, 4 Burma Army infantry divisions withdrew from the region before the mid-April water festival.⁸

ANALYSIS

President Htin Kyaw in his New Year Message once again highlighted the need and importance of national reconciliation and peace. However, coupled with myriad of issues starting from democratic reforms, political, economic, social issues as well as sustainable and genuine peace, the tasks ahead for his government will not be easy. National reconciliation is an issue deeply rooted to issues related to the ethnic nationalities and the deprivation of their rights practiced by successive governments. The NLD-led government will therefore need to adopt a different approach from its predecessors and promote the diverse interests of the ethnic nationalities groups if it is to achieve national reconciliation and peace. In order to do so, the government will need to implement ‘an all-inclusive dialogue’ not only with the parliamentary circles but also within the public domain with all stakeholders having the opportunity to express their views and opinions. More importantly, compromises by all stakeholders will be crucial if the on-going peace process is to be successful. Many think that making compromises is a form of surrender and thus are reluctant. This mindset and way of thinking should be avoided and it should be seen more as a way to move forward while at the same time maintaining one’s principle and objectives. It remains to be seen as to what extent the new government is willing to make compromises while at the same time needing to strike a balanced and amicable relationship with the

⁸ SSA-N: Burma Army Demands Withdrawal From Strategic Outposts – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ssa-n-burma-army-demands-withdrawal-from-strategic-outposts.html> (the Irrawaddy) 21 April 2016

military (Tatmadaw). This once again highlights the role of the military in the running of the country and that the government will need to consider that any action or measures taken to not undermine the military's interests as well as its support. The new government has yet to define its agenda on the peace process but it remains to be seen as if it can bring peace and national reconciliation to the country.

Appendices

Appendix A: FULL STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT HTIN KYAW'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

On this auspicious occasion, the Myanmar New Year, I'd like to wish all Myanmar people throughout the nation, physical and mental wellbeing. In the last few days, everyone has enjoyed the water festival and beginning today, the auspicious New Year will begin. On such a day of significance, I'd first of all like to express words of thanks to citizens for their overwhelming 'yes' vote in the November 8, 2015 general elections, which has enabled our government to take over the responsibilities of the State. I'd also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the voting public for giving me the chance to deliver a new year's greeting message. We continue to strive for the release of political prisoners, political activists and students facing political charges and are using the means as prescribed in the constitution and criminal procedures to lift these sentences and to acquit them in the New Year period. This is a solution for current cases, and in future, a sustained effort will be made to prevent those who act legally for political causes or for their own conscience from being imprisoned. We believe everybody is hoping that this new year and in the years to come there will bring many opportunities to enable our nation and our people to reach a higher level politically, economically and socially. However, to be able to utilize these opportunities most effectively and to bring about the best results for the country, our government will be required to exert effort with constant vigil and relentless diligence.

In this function, the citizens are particularly needed to co-operate to ensure success. This being so, in our administration's effort to implement such policies as national reconciliation, internal peace, emergence of a constitution that aims to establish a democratic federal union and the promotion of the social life of our people for the sake of the country, we would like to earnestly ask you, the voting public, to actively continue to co-operate in your respective sectors, to criticize and point out our discrepancies and fallacies where you see them, and make suggestions as to what ought to be done. I wish you the best in getting through the New Year with new vigour, new strength, and a new mindset and mentality. I'd also like to express my special delight and appreciation for your "*satudisa*" donations and contributions of voluntary labour all over the country, as a warm welcome to the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi led government as it assumes the duties of State. I wish you all physical and mental well-being.⁹

Appendix B: FULL TEXT OF NEW YEAR MESSAGE OF STATE COUNSELLOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI

On this New Year occasion, I wish all our countrymen and the people around the world physical and mental well-being and freedom from danger. I'm delighted to have a chance to greet my people on such an auspicious occasion. I assume that it is a good omen for us the National League for Democracy-led new government to take over the duties of the State beginning from New Year. I said this is a good omen because it is a time when we start to construct new good things for a change. Here, I'd like to explain a bit the expression NLD-led government. This expression does not mean that NLD dominates, takes power and obtains the right to rule. What I mean is that we are a regime which will abide by the policies laid bare to the people during the election campaign. We'll keep our words but keeping this campaign promise shall be according to the policies and principles of NLD. As known to you all, our policies and principles are to ensure national reconciliation, internal peace, the rule of law, the amendment to the constitution and keeping the democratic system dynamic and well ingrained. What matters most is national reconciliation. If a nation has to progress and prosper, unity is of utmost importance. That's why I'd like to make it clear that when we said we're a regime oriented towards national reconciliation, I mean that I'm in favour of entire people regardless of voting for or against

⁹ Amendment Essential: State Counsellor offers New Year Message –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/18_April_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 April 2016 (p. 1& 3)

us. There shall not be whatsoever discrimination. A democratically elected government is responsible for all citizens, being fair and square to everybody, harbouring loving kindness and compassion towards all. That's why we lay a special emphasis on national reconciliation. In this function, we hope that all countrymen will participate and render support. When I mentioned the phrase rule of law, I mean we want all citizens to lead a secure life under the protection of law. Law suggests justice. And the laws shall be properly enforceable. It's vitally important for our judicial pillar to stay upright and effective. The administration of justice shall be fair and just and be in accord with the internationally accepted norms.

It is said justice is the fair trial. Justice is not something that is uttered by the mouth; it needs manifestation by the action. This is a basic principle. Another very important principle for the prevalence of the rule of law is that a person shall be regarded as innocent if there is no valid proof and/or evidence against him. This is a basic principle. Even those who were found guilty deserve leniency in effective administration of justice. This is the reason why the President has shown leniency and/or magnanimity by signing the agreement to grant amnesty on this auspicious occasion of New Year. The very essence of the rule of law is to protect the people and provide them with psychological and physical security.

The rule of law does not suggest restrictions being imposed upon the people. Nor it suggests oppression. Some people are scared by the laws. In their opinion, the laws are made to oppress the people. I would unambiguously and unequivocally say that laws are not meant for that. The rule of law is also virtually important to internal peace. Without the rule of law, we cannot construct peace. When talking about peace, I'd also like to say at the same time that we've no intention whatsoever to abandon the activities and actions of the previous regime. We recognize their good deeds, and we'll continue to build on them. So, regarding the internal peace process, we highly appreciate their ceasefire initiative. We'll continue to strive to include in the ceasefire accord the organizations that we deem appropriate for inclusion.

Through peace conferences, we'll continue to be able to build up a genuine, federal democratic union aspired by entire countrymen. The internal peace process and the establishment of a genuine, federal democratic union are closely intertwined. That's why we need constitutional amendment. The constitution needs to be one that will give birth to a genuine, federal democratic union. In our effort to amend the constitution, we'll choose ways and means that would not adversely affect the people. We won't resort to means which will affect national peace. This is the principle NLD has always stuck to. People won't suffer. It will be us who will suffer if needed. We'll back you and protect you. I'd like to assert that the very firm principle of our new regime is to put the nation on the correct path, employing the ways and means that will not affect the people.

Thinking of constitution, the most important point is the basic principle No 4 of it i.e. the sovereign power descends from the countrymen. It rests throughout the nation. This is the basic principle of democracy. We accept this principle in toto. We'll practice it. Countrymen matter most. Countrymen are the first, the second and the ultimate. The country exists for the countrymen. A country will be meaningless without the country people. And the government shall exist for the countrymen. I'd like to promise our people never to relinquish this principle. The whole world is saying that our country abounds in natural resources. But frankly speaking, I don't take it very seriously. What really counts is the strength of our people, not the resources, for they can be deplete someday. And if we look around the world, even the very small countries lacking natural resources can be found to be profoundly influential. You can notice they are achieving economic growth. That's why I rely more on our people. One of the objectives of our new administration is to promote people's capacity and qualification. We'll exert effort to enable our people to be loyal to the state and to perform national duty well. Our country will be faced with different challenges. The country has a lot of things to change and transform. At the moment, I'd not go into detail as to what changes to make. It'll be a long list. But, I believe our countrymen know what more important matters are. Just as we believe our people, I want

you to do the same and participate and cooperate with a firm belief. This is my request. Only a regime cannot make a country a success. It cannot effectuate the national development alone. Only with the participation of the people can these things be achieved. That's why I'd like to request you all to be duty conscientious and to be committed to exertion of concerted effort. World is developing very fast now. So, we've to put forth much greater effort to keep ourselves abreast of the world. I remember my father saying in the aftermath of the World War II that we need to run while people from other countries are walking to keep peace with them. Even then, he said, we might need a 20 years' time to catch up. Now too, the situation is not very much different from that of those days, I think. When people from other countries are walking, we need to run, taking great trouble to be able to catch them up. Well, in doing so, I prefer to choose the correct ways and means. When I said I want to see our country stand tall among the world's nations, I'm not just referring to material wellbeing, what I mean is I want our people respected by the world's nations in terms of ability and qualifications and highly valued, too. I want our people to be able to raise their heads, looking proud to be Myanmarers wherever they go. That's how I want my people to stand tall among the world's nations.

We have to strive hard for that. When we pleaded for popular support, we didn't give any easy promises. We've never said our country will prosper overnight. The reason of not giving such a promise is not that we don't believe in ourselves, not that we don't believe in our people but that we're aware of the herculean tasks ahead. The tasks are heavy, requiring herculean effort. The national duty is something very important and very heavy. That's why we don't want to give easy promises in the presence of multifarious, onerous duties. But what I dare say is we can win public participation. Nothing is unachievable if we can win popular support and public confidence. I think people will want to know our foreign policy in the global context. Since the attainment of independence, our country has maintained good relations with all parts of the world. This is something our country can be very much proud of. Since regaining independence in January 1948, our country despite being a small one and amidst war-torn damages has always won international respect. Why? Our people could have been resilient amidst the dramatic woes, showing their talents. We're all required to make concerted effort to reach such a level of international recognition. We need to ponder over how to continue our journey and which policies and which fundamental ideologies to adopt. This will be a long journey. And the future of a nation is a thing of eternity. This is an ordeal, having to face a host of challenges. How can we overcome them, then? Some are worried that our new regime lacks experience concerning administration and management. Yes, we lack experience. But we are not reluctant to work together with the experienced individuals. We've no idea of ignoring the people from the old regimes. We want everybody who can bring benefit to the country to join our hands. The 1947 elections were held in the direction towards Myanmar Independence. Here again, I'd like to quote my father. What he said is concise and clear. The country would be ruled based on loving kindness and loyalty. What it meant is that the countrymen will be loved and the government will be loyal to the country. Despite a very short vow, this kind of promise is one that should be made by any regime. We also have the same vow. We'll love our people. We'll be loyal to our country. We're bound to succeed if we can keep this promise. May I conclude by wishing all my country people a success throughout the future and by urging you all to be overwhelmed with loving kindness and loyalty.¹⁰

¹⁰ New Mindset for 1378: Continue to co-operate with us, countrymen –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/17-4-2016.pdf> (GNLM) 17 April 2016 (p. 1& 3)