

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 30

OFFICIAL MEDIA

BURMA'S VICE-PRESIDENT VISITS CHINA

A Burmese delegation led by Vice-President Thiha Thura U Tin Aung Myint Oo attended the 8th China-ASEAN Expo and Business and Investment Summit hosted in Nanning of Guangxi Zhaung Autonomous Region in China.¹

During the visit the Vice-President reportedly met Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on the side-lines of the summit and told Chinese officials that Burma was keen to resolve the issue of the US\$ 3.6 billion Myitsone dam project which Burma suspended earlier this month. Both sides have stated that they would pursue and resolve the issue in an amicable and orderly manner. While diplomatic efforts are being pursued, the Chinese Power Investment (CPI) Corporation has hinted that it may seek legal damages from the Burmese government for non-compliance of its obligations. The Nay Pyi Taw government will no doubt find ways to please its northern neighbours in restoring and maintaining the special "Phauk-paw" relationship between the two countries.²

BURMA'S LOWER AND UPPER HOUSE SPEAKERS RECEIVE FORMER CHAIRMAN OF JAPAN-MYANMAR PARLIAMENTARIAN LEAGUE

A Japanese goodwill delegation led by former Chairman of the Japan-Myanmar Parliamentarian League and senior speaker of the Japanese House of Counsellors Mr. Watanabe Hideo met Thura U Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Lower House and U Khin Aung Myint, Speaker of the Upper House in Nay Pyi Taw. Those present included officials as well as the chairmen and secretaries of parliamentary committees of the Lower and Upper Houses. The meetings centered around discussions on the promotion of ties between the two countries' parliaments, as well as the further strengthening of relations.³

The visit comes at a time when Burma and Japan are aiming to restore relations after Japan suspended official development assistance (ODA) to Burma following the 1988 mass demonstrations. Nay Pyi Taw also dispatched Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin to Japan, in a bid to promote bilateral relations, which was the first visit by a Burmese foreign minister in 16 years. His meetings with Japanese officials were expected to include discussions on increased development assistance and possible trade agreements.

¹ President U Thein Sein sees off Vice-President Thiha Thura U Tin Aung Myint Oo on departure for PRC - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 October 2011 (p. 1) -

The Vice-President was accompanied by Minister for National Planning and Economic Development and for Livestock and Fisheries U Tin Naing Thein, Union Minister for Science and Technology U Aye Myint, Union Minister for Commerce U Win Myint, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Maung Myint, Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Ohn Than, Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation Thura U Thauung Lwin, member of the Advisory Group in the President's Office U Hset Aung and other senior officials.

² Burmese Vice President Tin Aung Myint Oo Visits China - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22296 (Irrawaddy) 20 October 2011 / China tells Burma VP to 'keep promises' - <http://www.dvb.no/news/china-tells-burma-vp-to-%E2%80%98keep-promises%E2%80%99/18325> (DVB) 21 October 2011 /

See also: EBO Political Monitor 29 (8 to 14 October 2011) - http://euro-burma.eu/doc/PM_No._29_-_17-10-11.pdf

³ Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives former chairman of Japan-Myanmar Parliamentarian League senior speaker of Japanese House of Counsellors -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 October 2011 (p. 2) /

Upper House Speaker receives former chairman of Japan-Myanmar Parliamentarian League senior speaker of Japanese House of Counsellors -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 October 2011 (p. 7)

HLUTTAW SESSIONS (35th to 38th day) – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) session:

The following key issues were discussed during the session:

- **Natural Gas:** U Aye Mauk of Mahlaing Constituency (USDP) asked if there were plans to supply natural gas as fuel within the country and to give priority to domestic instead of foreign customers.

Union Minister for Energy U Than Htay responded by saying that natural gas from both inland and offshore production cannot cater to local consumption. Burma, at present, requires 572 million cubic-feet of natural gas per day and the ministry is only able to provide 240 million cubic-feet of natural gas, which accounts for 42% of local demand. While Burma has a vast natural gas reserves, previous governments invited foreign companies to invest, develop, and explore these oil and gas reserves. Based on product sharing contracts with international companies, the income accumulated from the sale of gas has been used to refinance the debts and loans, therefore the country has had to sell its off-shore natural gas to foreign countries due to lack of technology and investment.⁴

- **Border trade (Thantlang Township):** Daw Zar Ta Lem of Thantlang Constituency (Chin National Party) asked whether there were plans to designate Thantlang Township in Chin State as a border trade town on the Burma-India border.

Union Minister for Commerce U Win Myint replied that currently Tamu and Reedchorda border towns have already been opened. In order to open border camps, bilateral agreements need to be made with India. Therefore, when Thantlang Township has the basic requirements needed to open a border trade camp, the Union ministries will form a coordination team to assess the area and the findings will be submitted to the government.⁵

- **Farmland tax:** U Htay Win of Lewe Constituency (USDP) asked about plans to levy a farmland tax at a reasonable rate.

Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Khin Zaw responded that the current rate had been fixed during the colonial era and therefore it would be necessary to conduct land surveys to assess the present situation. To be able to fix the land tax rate, the ministry is planning to conduct a census of farmland in order to compile data, maps and records of farmlands. After all the data is compiled, the findings would be submitted to the Union government with a view to amending the existing farmland tax rates.⁶

- **Bill to revoke the Fundamental Rights and Responsibilities of the People's Workers (1964):** The Upper House sent the bill back to the Lower House with its approval on 18 October. The bill has been approved with the agreement of both Houses and therefore enters into force.⁷

⁴ Second regular session of first Pyithu Hluttaw continues for 36th day / Three questions raised and answered – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2011 (p. 8 & 9)

⁵ Second regular session of first Pyithu Hluttaw continues for 37th day / Nine questions answered, one bill approved – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 October 2011 (p. 16, 8 & 9)

⁶ Second regular session of first Pyithu Hluttaw continues for 38th day / Ten questions answered, one bill approved – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 October 2011 (p. 16, 8 & 9)

⁷ Second regular session of first Pyithu Hluttaw continues for 38th day / Ten questions answered, one bill approved – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 October 2011 (p. 16, 8 & 9)

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) Session:

The following key issues were discussed during the session:

- **TV, receiver & video licenses:** U Thaw Zin Oo of Magway Region constituency No. 9 (USDP) asked about plans to change the existing tax collection and payment systems of the Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications for broadcast receivers, TV and video licenses.

Union Minister for Communications, Posts and Telegraphs U Thein Tun replied that as the current fee payment system is no longer appropriate, and that arrangements are being made to draw up a new communications law. However, he added that it will take a long time to have the opinion of the Attorney-General's Office and the approval of the House.⁸
- **Bill on Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management:** The Union Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Myint Hlaing submitted the Vacant Lands, Fallow Lands and Virgin Lands Management Bill, and the Upper House agreed to discuss the bill at a future date.⁹
- **Ministerial wages/allowances:** Dr Aye Maung of Rakhine State Constituency No.1 (RNDP) submitted a proposal to allow the "National Races Affairs Ministers to enjoy emoluments [wages/allowances] equivalent to that of Region/State Minister as prescribed in the constitution". The House agreed that the National Races Affairs Ministers should enjoy the same emoluments as the Region/State Ministers and requested Dr Aye Maung to draw up a bill amending the law on emoluments, allowances and insignias of region or state level personalities for submission to the House.¹⁰

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ONLY 600 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA SAYS PRESIDENT'S ADVISOR

Speaking to Swedish Radio, Presidential advisor U Ko Ko Hlaing said that Burma only had around 600 prisoners of conscience and almost half of them had been released in the amnesty granted by the government on 12 October. He said that accusations claiming that there are 2,000 political prisoners in Burma were "an exaggeration" and the 300 political detainees that had already been released cannot be considered a small number. He added that he thought more would be freed in the near future.¹¹

7 RAKHINE POLITICAL PRISONERS INCLUDED IN GOVERNMENT'S AMNESTY

Only seven political prisoners from Rakhine State were reportedly included among the nearly 300 prisoners released in the general amnesty on 12 October from prisons across the country. Those released included Ko Min Aung and Ko San Lwin from Taungok, Ashin Ithariya (a) Ko Aung Soe from Maungdaw, U Kawvida and U Mra Tun from Pauktaw, Ko Naing Soe from Buthidaung, and Ko Kyaw Won Chay a member of the Ethnic Youth Network Group (EYNG).¹²

⁸ Second regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for 36th day / Six questions answered, one question changed to proposal and approved, one bill and one proposal approved -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 October 2011 (p. 16, 9 & 10)

⁹ Second regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for 36th day / Six questions answered, one question changed to proposal and approved, one bill and one proposal approved -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 October 2011 (p. 16, 9 & 10)

¹⁰ Second regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for 37th day / Five queries answered, one proposal decided as unnecessary, two new proposals submitted -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 October 2011 (p. 16, 9 & 10)

¹¹ Only 600 political prisoners in Burma: President's Advisor -

http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22283 (Irrawaddy) 18 October 2011

¹² 7 Arakanese Political Prisoners Included Amongst those Released -

<http://www.narinjara.com/details.asp?id=3132> (Narinjara) 14 October 2011

SSA-SOUTH TO ENTER PEACE TALKS

The Burmese government and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the political wing of the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), have agreed to commence peace talks, according to a RCSS statement. The breakthrough stems from a letter dated 18 August¹³ in which Burmese President Thein Sein announced that his government desired to enter peace talks with all ethnic armed groups. However, the two sides have yet to fix a date and the location for the talks. SSA-S Lieutenant General and RCSS leader Sao Yawd Serk said that if President U “Thein Sein is interested to talk about peace, then it is good to have peace.” Previously, the SSA-S and the Burmese government failed to implement ceasefires talks after the sides could not agree on a location for the talks. The government favoured Tachileik, a Burmese town in Shan State on the border with Thailand, while the SSA-S insisted on Mae Sai, the Thai town opposite Tachileik in Chiang Rai province. However, Yawd Serk has now confirmed, “As long as [the Burmese government] can guarantee security and safety, we can hold the talks [in Tachileik].”¹⁴

ANALYSIS

The decision taken by President Thein Sein to suspend the several-billion dollar Myitsone dam project in the Kachin State has, on the one hand, pleased the Burmese people, while, on the other hand, caused discord in relations with Burma’s energy-hungry Chinese neighbour. However, as neighbours, the two countries need to find ways of resolving problems amicably. In the past, Sino-Burmese relations always seemed to be based on friendship and mutual respect. Therefore, the present situation will no doubt be seen as an entering into uncharted waters. Whatever the outcome, the present crisis has shown that President U Thein Sein seems to be prepared to listen to and respect the wishes of the people. That, in itself, may be a small, but positive step in the right direction.

¹³ Union Government offers olive branch to national race armed groups - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-08-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 August 2011 (p. 1)

¹⁴ SSA-South to enter peace talks – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/6088-ssa-south-to-enter-peace-talks.html> (Mizzima) 21 October 2011

APPENDICES

Other important announcements and news

Appendix A:

Registration of Democratic Alliance Party granted¹⁵

NAY PYI TAW, 14 Oct—*The Union Election Commission released Notification No. 53/2011 today. The translation of the notification is as follows:-*

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Union Election Commission
Nay Pyi Taw
Notification No. 53/2011
2nd Waning of Thadingyut, 1373 ME
(14 October, 2011)**

Registration of Democratic Alliance Party granted

The Democratic Alliance Party, headquartered at Block 310 in Letywaygyi Ward of West Daewun Ward, Chanayethazan Township of Mandalay Region, was permitted to register in accord with Political Parties Registration Law Section 9 as of 14 October 2011.

The registration number of Democratic Alliance Party is 45.

**By order,
Sd/ Win Ko
Secretary
Union Election Commission**

Appendix B:

Registration of Party for Unity and Peace granted¹⁶

NAY PYI TAW, 14 Oct—*The Union Election Commission released notification No. 54/2011 today. The translation of the announcement is as follows:-*

**Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Union Election Commission
Nay Pyi Taw
Notification No. 54/2011
2nd Waning of Thadingyut, 1373 ME
(14 October, 2011)**

Registration of Party for Unity and Peace granted

The Party for Unity and Peace, headquartered at No. 10 on Gawthaka Road in Thayagon Ward of Mingala Taungnyunt Township of Yangon Region, was permitted to register in accord with Political Parties Registration Law Section 9 as of 14 October 2011.

The registration number of Party for Unity and Peace is 46.

**By order,
Sd/ Win Ko
Secretary
Union Election Commission**

¹⁵ <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 October 2011 (p. 9)

¹⁶ <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs12/NLM2011-10-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 October 2011 (p. 9)