

## POLITICAL MONITOR NO.12

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### MEIKTILA UNDER CURFEW AFTER COMMUNAL UNRESTS

Meiktila a small town in central Burma, was placed under curfew after a dispute between a Muslim gold shop owner and customers led to rioting in which several buildings and leaving five dead – and 39 wounded according to state-run daily New Light of Myanmar. Official news media also stated that religious buildings including a mosque, several shops and a government office in Yan Myo Aung, and South Pyitharyar and Yadana Mann Aung wards in Meiktila were destroyed by the rioters. Other townships under curfew include Wundwin, Mahlaing and Thazi. Relations between Buddhists and minority Muslims have simmered since sectarian violence erupted last year in western Rakhine state in which 110 people were killed, according to official sources, and 120,000 people made homeless.<sup>1</sup>

#### PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND

At the invitation of New Zealand Prime Minister Mr John Key and Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia Ms Quentin Bryce, President U Thein Sein arrived in New Zealand on 14 March to begin his four day to promote relations between the two countries. During his visit President Thein Sein had official talks with the Governor-General Jerry Mateparae and Prime Minister John Key. The two sides exchanged views on Burma's on-going political reform process, cooperation between the two countries as well as investment in education, livestock and human resources development sectors. New Zealand also reaffirmed that it would extend a helping hand to the democratization process and economic reforms and arrangements would be made for appointment of New Zealand Ambassador in Yangon.<sup>2</sup>

#### PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN ARRIVES IN AUSTRALIA

The Burmese President and party arrived in Sydney, Australia on 17 March as part of his tour of the southern hemisphere. During his visit to Canberra, President Thein Sein met Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and discussed further strengthening of ties between the two countries. At the talks the Australian Prime Minister announced that her country would increase aid to Burma in recognition of on-going reforms taking place in Burma. She also pledged an additional 20 million Australian dollars (20.6 million U.S. dollars) over two years for the first phase of the new Burma/Myanmar- Australia Partnership for Reform and stated that Australia will also lift some restrictions on defense engagement and will post a resident Defense Attaché to Burma. The Burmese President also held meetings with the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia Ms. Quentin Bryce exchanged views on women's rights, child welfare, poverty alleviation and tourism development.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Declaration of State of Emergency –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/233newsn.pdf> (NLM) 23 March 2013 (p. 1)/

Meiktila placed under curfew as from 8 pm, 20 March Effective action to be taken against those who led riot –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/223newsn.pdf> (NLM) 22 March 2013 (p.16 & 9)/

Mobs stalk the streets of Meiktila –

<http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/9104-mobs-stalk-the-streets-of-meiktila.html> (Mizzima) 22 March 2013

<sup>2</sup> President U Thein Sein pays goodwill visits to New Zealand, Australian Commonwealth –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/143newsn.pdf> (NLM) 14 March 2013 (p. 1)/

New Zealand will help Myanmar to carry out reforms –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2013 (p. 1)/

New Zealand recognizes Myanmar's political and economic reforms –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p. 1)

<sup>3</sup> President U Thein Sein arrives in Australia –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/183newsn.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2013 (p. 1)/

Australian Governor-General welcomes President U Thein Sein –

### **CHINESE SPECIAL ENVOY FOR ASIAN AFFAIRS MEETS BURMESE LEADERS**

Ambassador Wang Yingfan, Special Envoy for Asian Affairs of China's Foreign Ministry, called on Burmese Vice President U Nyan Tun on 14 March and discussed further cementing relationships between Myanmar and China, China's assistance to peace-making processes in Myanmar, prevalence of peace and stability in the border common and development of socioeconomic status of the peoples. The Special Envoy also held meetings with the Speakers of both the Upper and Lower House and the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Armed Forces. During the talks, the two sides discussed matters relating to cooperation on promoting comprehensive strategic relations between Burma and China and strengthening ties between the armed forces of the two countries.<sup>4</sup>

### **BELGIUM DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER IN BURMA**

Burmese Vice-President Nyan Tun received Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs Didier Reynders and party 15 March in Naypyitaw. The two sides exchanged views focussed on environmental conservation, maintenance of water course in major rivers, cooperation in education and health sectors, investment in port construction at economic zones, relationship between EU and Burma/Myanmar, assistance for XXVII SEA Games and chairmanship in ASEAN in 2014. The visiting delegation also called on Speaker of the Lower House, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and the Chair of the National Human Rights Commission and discussed cooperation between the two countries in parliamentary affairs as well as issues related to trade and investment and human rights situation in Burma.<sup>5</sup>

### **VICE PRESIDENT RECEIVES FORMER BRITISH PM TONY BLAIR**

A delegation led by former Prime Minister of Britain Tony Blair called on Burmese Vice President Nyan Tun on 15 March and discussed cooperation economic development in Burma/Myanmar and cooperation in strengthening governance and public administration. While in the country, Mr Blair also met the Speaker of the Lower House Thura Shwe Mann and Defence Minister Lt-Gen Wai Lwin and exchanged views on cooperation between Burma the Britain in parliamentary affairs and the reform process including the conflict in Kachin State.<sup>6</sup>

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<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/193newsn.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2013 (p. 1)/  
President U Thein Sein holds talks on further bilateral cooperation with Australian PM –  
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/193newsn.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

<sup>4</sup> Vice-President U Nyan Tun receives Special Envoy on Asian Affairs of PRC –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2013 (p. 16)/  
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker meets Special Envoy on Asian Affairs of PRC –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2013 (p. 8)/  
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Chinese guests –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2013 (p. 9)/  
General Soe Win receives Chinese Special Envoy –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p. 9)

<sup>5</sup> Vice-President U Nyan Tun receives former British Prime Minister, Belgian Dy PM –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p. 16)/  
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives US, British, Belgian guests –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p.8)/  
Belgian Dy PM meets UMFCFI President –  
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/183newsn.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2013 (p. 16)/  
Belgian Dy PM meets MNHKC Chairman –  
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/183newsn.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2013 (p. 9)/  
Belgian Dy PM and party conclude visit –  
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/183newsn.pdf> (NLM) 18 March 2013 (p. 1)

<sup>6</sup> Vice-President U Nyan Tun receives former British Prime Minister, Belgian Dy PM –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p. 16)/  
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives US, British, Belgian guests –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 March 2013 (p.8)/

## JAPANESE SPECIAL ENVOY AFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO END ARMED CONFLICT IN BURMA

Special Envoy of the Japanese Government to National Reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar Chairman of Nippon Foundation Yokei Sasakawa promised to cooperate with the Burmese government to end the armed conflict in the country. The Special Envoy reaffirmed the Japanese government's commitment to help Burma/Myanmar to bring about national reconciliation at a press conference held at the Inya Lake Hotel in Yangon 14 March. The Japanese government is also planning to give assist the Burmese government in hardware development and to providing humanitarian supplied those affected by the Kachin conflict.<sup>7</sup>

### HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

#### Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 31<sup>st</sup> day meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March. During the session the following issue was raised and discussed:

- U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency (6) (USDP) complained that **government ministries, despite their strong commitments, had not taken serious actions towards issues raised at the parliamentary sessions, regarding the proposals which he had submitted to the house, MP Myo Myint blamed the ministries for not handling the proposals effectively and transparently, and also questioned their responses.** The Speaker of the House in responding said that, a **proposal would be submitted calling for the categorizing the government's commitments, public petitions and complaints, and human rights cases according to their degree of immensity; and assessing the functions and responsive actions of parliamentary committees on a regular basis and that a reminder would be sent to the cabinet office and the lower house speaker to forward a message to the President if there is still no response four months. The house approved the instruction of the speaker to apply it as a parliamentary procedure.**<sup>8</sup>

### HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

#### Pyidaungsu Hluttaw sessions

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 21<sup>st</sup> day meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March. During the session the following key issues were raised and discussed:

- The session accepted the President's recommendations for the 2013-Minimum Wage Bill after the issue was put to the vote;
- 8 MPs proposed amendments to the controversial Foreign Investment Rules between the two Hluttaws and Pyidaungsu Hluttaw accepted the amendments;
- Union Minister for Finance and Revenue U Win Shein submitted a proposal to discuss the Union Budget Bill-2013;
- U Aye Mauk of Mahlaing constituency (USDP) stressed the need for scrutinizing the projects by the joint financial committee comprising members of the parliament, for formation of district/township level subordinate groups under the committee and transparency for the development infrastructures;

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Union Defence Minister receives Former British Prime Minister –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-16.pdf> (NLM) 16March 2013 (p.8)

<sup>7</sup> Japanese special envoy affirms commitment to end armed conflict in Myanmar –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 March 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>8</sup> Lawmakers call for responsiveness of government –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/223newsn.pdf> (NLM) 22 March 2013 (p.16)

- U Sai Maung Tin of Laikha constituency (SNDP) called for reducing the expenditure for the defence sector and for spending more on the development projects of the country.<sup>9</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 22<sup>nd</sup> day meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March. During the session the following key issues were raised and discussed:

- Minister for Finance and Revenue U Win Shein clarified the message from the President seeking **the parliament's approval for terminating FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificate) used as medium in the country's economic system.** The Hluttaw session approved the proposal for the abolishment of FEC;
- The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session **approved to discuss the message by the Lower House asking to proceed with the proposal to the formation of a parliamentary committee or commission to review the 2008 Constitution. The session decided to discuss the proposal at its seventh regular session.** Regarding the proposal, U Tun Kyaw of Shan State Constituency (10) (TPNP) said, **"the constitution can't be formulated once and for all and it needs amending and rewriting to meet the demands of age as the time passes by and that its ultimate objective is to serve the interests of the national people. It is a welcoming move to assess the constitution."**<sup>10</sup>

## UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

### **KNU IN BID TO REUNITE KAREN SPLINTER GROUPS**

The Karen National Union (KNU), said it has formed a committee to focus on the reunification of all Karen armed forces. According to KNU sources, the "Committee for Reunification of Separated Karen Armed Groups" was formed after the recent KNU Central Committee meeting held in late February and chaired by Maj-Gen Saw Johnny, the commander-in-chief of the KNU's military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Naw Zipporah Sein, the vice-chairman of the KNU said although the KNU has used the term "reunification," it does not know exactly how the process will evolve. Apart from the KNU, there are a number of Karen armed groups operating in Karen State including the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), KNU/KNLA Peace Council, the Border Guard Force (BGF) and Karen Peace Force (KPF). Naw Zipporah Sein also added that even though the groups were separated from the KNU and hold different political goals, they all have the same key objective as the KNU: equality and self-determination for all of the Karen people.<sup>11</sup>

### **88 GENERATION STUDENTS MULL FORMING POLITICAL PARTY**

The leadership of the 88 Generation Students, who recently rebranded themselves as the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, are considering forming a political party, but have not made a final decision, according to the one of the group's leading members. During a recent interview a leading member of the group said that the creation of a new political party that would include the 88 Generation Students' members was necessary to aid the country's democratic transition. "In order to establish genuine democracy, it is necessary to organize a combined force of 88 Generation members and all 88 generation [people] to implement national reconciliation and peace," said Htay Kywe. However, it remains unclear, which of the group's upper echelon is considering entering the country's political landscape.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passes President's recommendations for 2013-Minimum Wage Bill – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/193newsn.pdf> (NLM) 19 March 2013 (p. 1)

<sup>10</sup> Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to discuss amending constitution at its seventh regular session – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-03-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 March 2013 (p. 16)

<sup>11</sup> KNU in bid to reunited Karen splinter groups – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/29703> (Irrawaddy) 18 March 2013

<sup>12</sup> 88 Generation Students mull forming political party – <http://www.dvb.no/news/88-generation-students-mull-forming-political-party/27066> (DVB) 19 March 2013

## **ANALYSIS**

Burma's fragile path to democratic reforms has once again been marred by another outbreak of communal unrests between Buddhists and Muslim communities. The unrest which reportedly began from a disagreement in a gold-smith's shop in Meiktila, Mandalay Region, and turned into mob violence spreading to several other towns has once again highlighted the unwillingness or inability of local authorities to intervene as front-line actors. While the central government reacted quicker to the latest incident than it did in Rakhine State in 2012, it has fallen short in addressing the underlying issues and putting in place effective measures to avoid future racial and communal riots. Reports of Buddhists monks instigating the unrest are disturbing. The urgent need for the rule of law, as well as the building of understanding and mutual respect between all races and religions in Burma, is clear. While the reform process has been making headway with laws on the freedom of speech, assembly and many other liberal laws, one crucial segment that has been overlooked is the existing bureaucratic system of governance. Indeed if the democratic reforms are to succeed and further outbreaks of violence are to be avoided in the future, the central government must put in place measures to address such sensitive issues at the local level.