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OFFICIAL MEDIA

VICE-PRESIDENT MAUK KHAM MEETS LEADERS FROM ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS

Chairman of Union Peacemaking Work Committee Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham attended a meeting between the Union Peace-making Work Committee and Representatives of ethnic armed groups in Naypyitaw on 31 August. Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman Saw Mutu Sae Po, General Secretary Phado Saw Kwe Htoo Win, Lt-Col Sai Ngin from Restoration Council of the Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and KNU Political and Military Advisor Saw Tu Tu Lay gave clarifications on developments of the nation-wide ceasefire and Myanmar's peace process should be carried out to bear fruits before 2015 general elections and to enact necessary laws by the Hluttaw to achieve national level agreements through a political dialogue. Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee Thein Zaw and Pyithu Hluttaw representative Daw Dwe Bu explained the Hluttaw's role in union peace-making process and protecting the rights of national races. In his concluding remark, the Vice-President said that nation-wide peace needed patience and tolerance and highlighted the need for community organizations, civil society and individuals to play an active part in the peace process.¹

SPEAKER THURA SHWE MANN TOURS EASTERN AND NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann attended a meeting with regional government officials and locals in Kengtung on 4 September and discussed the on-going peace process and development projects for the region. The Speaker also held separate meetings with Aik Lun of Special Region (2) UWSA "Wa" Group and Sai Lin of Special Region (4) in the evening at Golden Triangle Yeiktha in Kengtung. Shwe Mann also paid a visit to Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State on 2 September, where he met State government officials, Hluttaw representatives and held talks with officials from Pa-O Self Administrated Zone, Pa-O National Liberation Organization and SSA/ RCSS. On 5 September Union parliament Speaker Shwe Mann met with local people in Kunlong Township. He also received Kokang Self-Administered Zone Leading Body Chairman Pei Sauk Chein and party in Laukkai, urged them to cooperate with the authorities in promoting peace and regional development. During his tour in the Shan State, parliamentary Speaker Shwe Mann stressed his support for federalism in Myanmar and urged the public to work together alongside the government and parliament to reach that objective.²

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ATTENDS 10TH ASEAN-CHINA EXPO

Myanmar President Thein Sein arrived in Nanning on 2 September to attend the 10th ASEAN-China Expo, set to be held from September 3-6. President Thein Sein, leaders from the 10-member ASEAN regional grouping and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, officials and entrepreneurs from the China and ASEAN countries attended the opening ceremony of 10th CAEXPO and CABIS held at Nanning International Convention & Exhibition Centre on 3 September. During the visit, President Thein Sein met Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and exchanged views on comprehensive strategic cooperation, ongoing process of implementation for promotion of partnership relations, further cooperation in

¹ Forward looking attitude is a must: Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham KNU will join hands with government for eternal peace: General Saw Mutu Sae Po Hluttaw should assist in peace process: Lt-Col Sai Ngin – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-01-red.pdf> (NLM) 1 September 2013 (p.1 & 9)

² Pyidaungsu and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets national race leaders, local people in Kengtung – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-05-red-op60.pdf> (NLM) 5 September 2013 (p.1)/ Federal system suited the country should be practised: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 September 2013 (p.9)/ Thura U Shwe Mann meets locals in Shan State (North) – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-06-red.pdf> (NLM) 6 September 2013 (p.16)

rural development and poverty alleviation, enhancement of foreign investment, extended exportation of exports, prospects of implementing Kyaukpyu Deep Sea-port and Special Economic Zone Projects, construction of Economic Corridor between India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China, further cooperation in education, health and infrastructural sectors and China-ASEAN relations. Chinese Premier also reiterated that the People's Republic of China supports a different approach adopted by Myanmar for ensuring perpetuation of sovereignty and stability and development of the nation. The Myanmar leader also held meetings with Governor of Yunnan Province Li Jigehen and Chairman of Petro-China Company Ltd Wang Dongjin and discussed economic cooperation between the two countries and progress of Myanmar-China natural gas pipelines and development tasks for the Kyaukphyu Special Industrial Zone in Rakhine State.³

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THEIN SEIN HOSTS SUU KYI FOR TALKS

President Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi met on 31 August in Naypyidaw. Ye Htut, Deputy Minister of Information, said that the meeting between President and NLD leader provided an opportunity to meet and exchange views on the state of affairs and Myanmar's reform process. Win Myint, a spokesperson for the National League for Democracy (NLD), said he knew the two had met but could not give comments regarding the issues discussed.⁴

KNU WANTS CONSTITUTION CHANGE, TALKS WITH KAREN POLITICAL PARTIES

A Karen National Union (KNU) chairman Saw Mutu Say Poe recently met with Karen political parties in Hpa-an, Karen State to discuss plans for amendments to the existing and contentious 2008 Constitution. The KNU delegation met with the Phalon Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP), the Karen People Party (KPP), Karen State Development Party (PSDP) and Karen Democratic Party (KDP) on August 28 on how they will push for amendments of the 2008 Constitution.

Saw Mutu Say Poe, said that the KNU was working on informing the public to understand the situation of its current peace building process with the government and that they would also start awareness campaigns on how the KNU will work towards amending the constitution. He said, "with the constitution amendment, the government only wants to do it through the existing system, that is through Hluttaw [Parliament]. The system [to amend constitution] that we want is outside the Hluttaw – this has been widely used by the international community. The KNU wants to amend the Constitution outside of the Hluttaw [Parliament]." He also added that the KNU already has a system in place for the constitution amendment outside of the Hluttaw and that the issue would be raised

³ President U Thein Sein and party arrive in Nanning of China – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-03-red.pdf> (NLM) 3 September 2013 (p.1 & 9)/ Myanmar, China exchange views on comprehensive strategic cooperation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-03-red.pdf> (NLM) 3 September 2013 (p.16)/ China supports Myanmar's approach for perpetuation of sovereignty, stability and development – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 September 2013 (p. 16)/ Line of communication between Myanmar and Yunnan to be upgraded – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 September 2013 (p.16)/ Stability of ASEAN's and China's economy becomes crucial for world economy – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 September 2013 (p. 1 & 8)/ President U Thein Sein concludes Nanning visit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-04-red.pdf> (NLM) 4 September 2013 (p. 1)

⁴ Thein Sein hosts Suu Kyi for talks – <http://www.dvb.no/news/thein-sein-hosts-suu-kyi-for-talks/32065> (DVB) 2 September 2013

with Aung Min, the Deputy Chair of the Union Peace Working Committee of the President's Office and other relevant government officials.⁵

KNU EXPLAINS ITS CEASEFIRE AND PEACE BUILDING PROCESS TO REFUGEES

The Karen National Union (KNU) met with refugees and representatives of civil society organizations in Mae La refugee camp on the Myanmar-Thai border to discuss and explain its ongoing peace building process with the government. The meeting took place on 29 August, amidst rumours circulating throughout the refugee population that there were plans to send them back to Myanmar.

Padoh Saw Hla Tun, an organizer of the meeting said that since the KNU and the government signed the ceasefire agreement there have been numerous issues including land confiscation, economic development projects and rumours about refugee repatriation were causing uncertainty amongst Karen community. He added by saying that anxiety among refugees has been high since the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 2012. And in order to ease the tensions and keep the peace process transparent and to discuss the issues of concern with the refugee populations.

Saw Taw Ni, the Secretary of Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CDIKP) said that displaced people should be a priority when plans are being made to return and reintegrate people back to Myanmar. "Taking into account the current political situation, we need to be prepared and have arrangements prioritized, first for the internally displaced communities rather than refugees in the camps. Without preparing for IDP reintegration or arranging for their housing first, it will make it impossible to return or resettle refugees." Over 250 individuals and representatives of civil society organizations attended the meeting.⁶

WA UNLIKELY TO JOIN ETHNIC ALLIANCE

Although the United Wa State Party/United Wa State Army (UWSP/UWSA) had attended the July conference led by the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), it should not be assumed that it is ready to become a member of the alliance, according to an informed source close to the group. "That goes for the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) of Sao Sai Leun too," he added. "Only the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) of Peng Jiasheng has agreed to join it." A delegation from the grouping is currently visiting Panghsang, where the Wa headquarters is located. He refused to identify the names of the delegates. All three groups had sent delegates to attend the UNFC led Ethnic Conference for Peace and Reconciliation, 29-31 July, in Chiangmai.

Both the UWSA and NDAA have maintained their fragile truce with Naypyitaw for 24 years. As for the ceasefire with MNDAA, better known as Kokang, it broke down when Kokang was invaded and occupied in 2009. Hkun Okker, UNFC's Joint Secretary #2, however, says the alliance was only trying to win over the 3 groups to join the UNFC led political negotiation team to parley with the government. Speaking on the meeting with Thura Shwe Mann, Speaker of the Union Assembly (Pyidaungzu Hluttaw) in Kengtung, the source commented it was a visit to cultivate relations with the UWSA and NDAA. "He has already declared himself a candidate for the next presidency," he said. "The meeting therefore was useful also for the Wa and Mongla (NDAA headquarters)."⁷

⁵ KNU wants constitution change, talks with Karen political parties – <http://karennews.org/2013/09/knu-wants-constitution-change-talks-with-karen-political-parties.html/> (Karen News) 3 September 2013

⁶ KNU explains its ceasefire and peace building process to refugees – <http://karennews.org/2013/09/knu-explains-its-ceasefire-and-peace-building-process-to-refugees.html/> (Karen News) 2 September 2013

⁷ Wa unlikely to join ethnic alliance – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5577:wa-unlikely-to-join-ethnic-alliance&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) – 4 September 2013

GOVERNMENT TROOPS AND KIO CLASH IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Government forces exchanged gun fire with forces loyal to the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in northern Shan state on 3 September, according to local residents. Fighting first broke out at Loi Lawm, and followed by another clash at Loi Dang near Mungbaw located in Muse Township. Both skirmishes involved troops from the government's Light Infantry Battalion No. 578 and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) forces based in the Mongkoe area who are affiliated with the group's 4th Brigade, according to a KIA sources in Pangsai. Local eyewitnesses said that shortly after the clashes they saw government troops transporting four dead soldiers from the scene.

Tensions have increased in the Pangsai area considerably since an army column from Infantry Battalion No. 69 arrived on Thursday with over 60 troops, said Zau Seng, a militia commander based in the Pangsai area known as the Mungshawa Hpyen Hpung (MHH). Troop movements on the ground indicate that the government is moving forward with its plan to expel all KIA forces from the Mongkoe area, former territory of the now defunct Communist Party of Burma (CPB), Zau Seng said.⁸

ANALYSIS

President Thein Sein's meeting with Chinese leaders are signs that the special 'pauk-phaw' friendship has not been affected by the recent shift in policy by the west. However, the visit will have given a stark reminder to both governments in Beijing and Naypyitaw that cooperation and understanding are key factors if ties between the two are to become beneficially mutual. And thus, if Sino-Myanmar relations are true it words as being a special 'pauk-phaw' friendship, both countries will need to adopt flexible policies of engagement and more importantly respect.

On the domestic front, the various meetings between Vice President Mauk Kham, Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and leaders of ethnic armed groups is yet another step towards national reconciliation. Meetings and statements alone will not be enough to achieve peace and stability. The government including the military (Tatmadaw) and all stakeholders will need to find a common ground and without which Myanmar's search for national reconciliation and peace will remain more elusive than ever before.

⁸ Burma army and KIO clash in northern Shan state's Muse Township – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2556-burma-army-and-kio-clash-in-northern-shan-state-s-muse-township.html> (KNG) 6 September 2013