

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.3

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT RECEIVES HUNGARIAN DELEGATION

President Thein Sein received a Hungarian delegation led by Mr Zsolt Nemeth, Minister of State for Hungarian Parliamentary Affairs in Naypyitaw on 11 January. The two leaders discussed matters relating to cooperation in human resource development, health and agricultural sectors, granting of Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and lifting of remaining sanctions against Burma (Myanmar). The Hungarian Parliamentary Secretary also held meetings with the Speaker of the Upper House Khin Aung Myint and Lower House Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and discussed strengthening and promoting of ties between the two parliaments of both countries.¹

BURMESE PRESIDENT RECEIVES RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

Burma and Russia have vowed to promote existing ties between the two countries and enhance cooperation in human resources development, technology, health and education sectors. The pledge came after a meeting between Burmese President Thein Sein and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Naypyitaw on 16 January.

The Russian Foreign Minister also had talks with his counterpart Wunna Maung Lwin and discussions were focused on enhancing cooperation in trade, investment, information, culture, sports, health, education, science and technology, defense and security, tourism, mining and energy, human resource development and capacity building. The two ministers also exchanged views on regional and international issues.

Russia and Burma (Myanmar) have already agreed to set up a joint inter-governmental commission and will sign a relevant agreement in the near future, he said, adding that two countries were also working on the establishment of a joint business council and an investment protection agreement.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries was established on February 18, 1948 but due to bilateral ties weakened during Burma's period of military rule due to the international economic sanctions, but have been reinvigorated since 2011.²

PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN RECEIVES ICRC PRESIDENT AND PARTY

The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, arrived in Burma (Myanmar) on 13 January to hold a series of meetings with President Thein Sein, other senior government officials. The Burmese President said the frequent arrivals of ICRC groups have contributed to better cooperation with the country. He also praised the stance of ICRC as a non-aligned organization with no political intervention and vowed to further strengthen cooperation with the ICRC during his term in office. Mr Maurer said that his visit was aimed at further strengthening and extending cooperation between Burma (Myanmar) and the ICRC and also to

¹ President receives Hungarian delegation –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 January 2013 (p. 8)/
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Hungarian Parliamentary Affairs Minister –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 January 2013 (p. 8)/
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker receives Hungarian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 January 2013 (p. 10)

² Myanmar, Russian Federation focus on further cooperation in human resource development, technology, research works on health, education –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2013 (p. 1)/
Myanmar-Russia FMs hold talks –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2013 (p. 1)/
Russia Calls for Lifting Myanmar Sanctions –
<http://en.rian.ru/politics/20130116/178814925.html> (RIA Novosti) 16 January 2013

provide further assistance in distributing humanitarian aid provided by ICRC in conflict areas in Burma (Myanmar).

The visiting ICRC delegation also held meetings with both Speakers of the Upper and Lower Houses of parliament and discussions were focussed on providing humanitarian aid, restoration of peace and stability in Rakhine and Kachin States. At the meeting, ICRC side stressed the importance of parliaments to practice democracy and expressed their wish to cooperate in legislation and other related sectors while also expressing their desire promote cooperation between Burma (Myanmar) and Burma.³

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 2nd day meeting on 11th January. During the session issues relating to **the armed conflict in Kachin State, Dawei Special Economic Zone, agricultural development and preventive measures for places vulnerable to floods were raised and discussed.**

- U Thein Zaw of Myitkyina Constituency submitted an urgent proposal calling for **the Union Peacemaking Central Committee and KIO/KIA and urged both sides in implementing electronic online negotiations to provide a more transparent discussion, paving the way to build trust through the negotiations which pay heed to the voices of the people to be able to ease the military tensions and to pave the way for the eternal peace;**
- Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation Thura U Thaung Lwin briefed the session on **the Dawei Special Economic Zone which was signed between Burma and Thailand in 2008, and that the project is being implemented with a view promoting the economic development of Greater Mekong Sub-region, and contributing to comprehensive development of other regions;**
- The Bill Committee submitted a report on **the Bill Amending the Emoluments, Allowances and Facilities of Region/State level personnel aimed at enabling national races affairs ministers to have equal rights as those of region/state ministers.**⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 2nd day meeting on 11th January. During the session the following issues were raised and answered:

- The Bill Committee submitted **the Anti-Corruption Bill** sent back by Pyithu Hluttaw. The Amyotha Hluttaw approved it and decided to submit the bill to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw for further discussions;
- Dr Myat Nyana Soe of Yangon Region Constituency No.4 submitted the proposal on **urging the Union government to establish Township Information and Public Relations Offices as Public Information Centres.** With respect to the proposal, Dr Aye Maung of Rakhine State Constituency No.1 said that most of the democratic countries released government's information at once.

³ President U Thein Sein receives ICRC President and party –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 January 2013 (p. 1)/
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker receives ICRC President –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 January 2013 (p. 8)/
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann receives ICRC President and party –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 January 2013 (p. 9)

⁴ Hluttaw urges UPMCC, KIO/KIA to build trust through negotiations which pay heed to voices of the people to be able to ease military tensions –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 January 2013 (p. 16)

Burma (Myanmar) saw more media freedom. And private newspapers were in circulation soon. People were going to have daily access to undertakings of government, political parties and other social organizations in a journal alone and thus the need to go to Public Information Centers to get access to information was deemed unnecessary and objected the proposal.

- U Paw Htan Htai of Chin State Constituency submitted the proposal on **urging the Union government to carry out more development of education and health in the remote areas than other regions.**⁵

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) Session

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) held its 1st day session on 10 January. In his address to the session, the Pyidaungsu (Union) Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint urged the Public Accounts Joint Committee to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently as the onus was on Hluttaw to scrutinize the budget whether it is in conformity with financial rules and regulations. The New Year Message sent by the President to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was put on record. During the session the following questions and issues were raised and answered:

- Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw read out the fifth five-year short-term National Plan (from 2011- 2012 to 2015-2016) (draft) of the Union government, and the Joint Bill Committee explained findings and comments. MPs Daw Khin Waing Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No (1) and Daw Tin Nwe Oo of Dagon Myothit (North) Township Constituency expressed their views regarding the national plan.
- The Union Minister also read out National Plan Bill for 2013-2014 fiscal year of the Union government;
- Similarly, the Joint Bill Committee read out the findings on comments of the President on **the bill amending the Attorney-General of the Union Law and bill amending the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union Law.**⁶

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) held its 2nd day session on 14 January. During the session, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker read out the message on the attendance of the President at the summit to mark the 20th anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue partnership held in New Delhi of India and the message was put on record. Issues raised and discussed during the 2nd day session included the following:

- Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Thant Kyaw made clarifications on Burma's current diplomatic representations abroad after which the Hluttaw approved the establishment of diplomatic ties with the Republic of Armenia;
- **The Bill amending the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union Law** was discussed by U Ye Tun of Hsipaw Constituency, Defence Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative Lt-Col Myo Myint Oo and Maj Tin Aung Moe. U Ye Tun of Hsipaw Constituency said that the tribunal will have to settle many disputes in the future and if the resolution of the tribunal is not final, it would provoke more problems in the future. So, the President's comment was appropriate, he said. Regarding the section 4 of the Bill, original provision of section 25 was terminated and the comment of the Joint Bill Committee was appropriate.

⁵ No plan to move Region offices in Sagaing Region to Sagaing: Dy Home Affairs Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 January 2013 (p. 16)

⁶ Fifth five-year short-term National Plan aims to develop agriculture sector more, translate nation into industrialized one ensuring all-round development – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 January 2013 (p. 16)

- Defence Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative Lt-Col Myo Myint Oo stated that Article 142 of the Constitution of Cambodia states that the Decisions of the Constitutional Council are final; Article 24 (c) of the Constitution of Indonesia states that the Constitutional Court shall possess the authority to try a case at the first and final level and shall have the final power of decision in reviewing laws against the Constitution; Article 79 of the Constitution of Russia states that the Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation shall be final and may not be appealed; and Article 167 (5) of the Constitution of South Africa states that the Constitutional Court makes the final decision. He then discussed that provisions in the original law are still valid. Amending the constitutional tribunal law could make it conflicting with the constitution and may require amendment of the constitution.
- Defence Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative Maj Tin Aung Moe discussed that the termination of Section 25 in the original law as the amendment bill proposes should be reconsidered by the Hluttaw because it would make the effect of resolutions of the tribunal ambiguous. The original Section 25 suggests that the resolutions of the tribunal affect respective regions instead of government organizations and personnel.
- In responding to the remarks by the MPs, Deputy-Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo, said that the Section 6 of the constitutional tribunal law should not be amended. As the Section 25 of the constitutional tribunal law should not be terminated because it is a necessary provision for enforcement of the law and not contrary to the constitution despite the fact it is not prescribed in the constitution, he said. He referred to Section 48 of the constitution which suggests, "The Basic Principles of the Union shall be the guidance in enacting laws by legislature and in interpreting the provisions of the constitution and other laws." He said the Basic Principles should be put into consideration. Amendment of a law conflicting with the constitution or prescription of an amendment bill should be made in accord with the provisions in the chapter of Amendment of the Constitution. The proposed bill was **approved by 186 yes votes, 370 abstentions and 37 no votes.**⁷

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) held its 3rd day session on 15 January. During the session, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker read out the message on the attendance of the President at the summit to mark the 20th anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue partnership held in New Delhi of India and the message was put on record. Issues raised and discussed during the session included the following:

- Eighteen MPs held discussions on **the fifth five-year short-term plan (from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016 fiscal year draft)**. Discussions were focussed on **agriculture, fisheries, forestry, education, commerce, rural and industrial development**. The plan (draft) aims to make a change in contribution ratio of agriculture sector, industrial sector and service sector between 2010-2011 fiscal year and 2015-2016 fiscal year. It is expected to increase the exports of K 15187.7 billion for 2015-2016 fiscal year that account for 9.0 per cent annual growth rate and the imports of K 9814 billion for 2015-2016 fiscal year that account for 9 per cent annual growth rate. During the fifth five year short-term plan, it is expected to reach 5.8 per cent GDP growth rate in Kachin State, 4.1 per cent in Kayah State, 8.3 in Kayin State, 6 per cent in Chin State, 9.3 per cent in Sagaing Region, 8.3 percent in Taninthayi Region, 6.4 per cent in Bago Region, 8.7 per cent in Magway Region, 8.5 per cent in Mandalay Region, 8.4 per cent in Mon State, 5.2 per cent in

⁷ Constitutional tribunal will have to settle many disputes in the future. Lack of power to pass final resolution may cause more problems –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 January 2013 (p. 16)

Rakhine State, 8.5 per cent in Yangon Region, 3.9 per cent in Shan State, 4.4 per cent in Ayeyawady Region and 29 per cent in Nay Pyi Taw Council Area.⁸

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) held its 4th day session on 16 January. The Fifth five-year National Plan (2011-2012 FY-2015-2016 FY) (draft) was discussed by 18 MPs during the session continues on 17 January. Key issues raised at the session included the following:

- Dr Mya Oo of Bago Region Constituency No (9) said the facts that the final year of the national plan coincides with the year that UN would assess whether the country achieves Millennium Development Goals and the poverty rate in rural areas is 29 percent and in urban areas are 13-18 percent should be put into consideration. He also said there are three years left to achieve the goals;
- U Than Myint of Taninthayi Region Constituency No (10) discussed forest replacement schemes must cover both extraction and damage caused by the production for environmental conservation and sustainable development. He said oil palm cultivation made the area plain;
- Dr Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No (8) said, "Policy should be laid to provide assistance when the paddy fields are subject to natural disasters." He also demanded the prevention against inundation of paddy fields and the wider role of the University of Agriculture. He also stressed the need to issue estimated GDP and trade, export, import and tax ratios in transparent manners;
- Dr Myat Nyana Soe of Yangon Region Constituency No (4) discussed, "In addition to GDP growth of the country, the promotion of education and healthcare standards is needed." He also said more investments should also be made in less profitable sectors such as education and health sectors while calling for balanced growth. He said, "Frankly speaking, there are still many requirements in education and health sectors."⁹

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) continued its 5th day session on 17 January. During the session the following key issues were raised and discussed:

- Dr Soe Yin of Kamayut Constituency submitted an urgent proposal **urging the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to investigate into the identity of a person who commented online about the vote on the laws amending the Attorney-General of the Union Law and Constitutional Tribunal of the Union Law at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 14 January, using the name of Dr Seik Phwar**. His comment, said Dr Soe Yin, was a slap to the face of parliamentarians and the functions of the Parliament, urging to form a commission for investigation into identity of Dr Seik Phwar who commented "Is parliament above the law" about the vote on above-mentioned laws. His proposal was put to the vote and the Hluttaw approved it as the majority voted in favour;
- U Samai Mongkwan (a) U Samai Tang of Sumprabun Constituency discussed fifth short-term five-year national plan (draft) and commented on foreign direct investment urging the Union government to pave way to enable foreign companies and citizens and national companies and businessmen to run joint ventures;
- U Ohn Kyaing of Mahaangmyay Constituency urged the Union government to provide inputs like quality strains and fertilizers sufficiently in time ahead of cultivation season, effectively protect the threat of insects after cultivation and purchase the output at world's market price after harvest like Vietnam and Thailand to help improve socio-economic status of farmers. Japan and South Korea had once practiced such approaches. In responding to the remarks and discussions of the Joint Bill Committee and MPs on fifth five-year national plan (draft), Union

⁸ Exploration and production of sources of electricity, a key to industrial development, underway – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 January 2013 (p. 16)

⁹ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues discussion of National Plan – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2013 (p. 16)

Minister Dr Kan Zaw said, while 20-year National Comprehensive Development Plan (NCDP) from 2011 to 2031 is being formulated in cooperation with experts from ERIA and advisors from UNDP, ESCAP, ADB and World Bank who run their full time office at the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Myanmar Comprehensive Development Vision (MCDV) was being also outlined by international academicians from Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) with the fund of over 3 million USD from JAIF. MCDV is planned to put forward to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in September and October, 2013. He concluded that it will need time to assess the discussions of MPs in detail and inter-coordinate among focal ministries, and region/ state governments on sector-focussed and local projects, asking the Hluttaw to grant a considerable amount of time. **The Hluttaw decided that the fifth five-year national plan should be redrafted by taking account of the remarks of the report of the Joint Bill Committee and recommendations of the MPs and put the original draft on record.**

- The session also recorded **the bill revoking the law which prevents threat against systematic transfer of power in peaceful and stable manner and successful implementation of National Convention's functions and the bill amending Traditional Medicine Council.**¹⁰

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

THEIN SEIN REPEALS REPRESSIVE LAW ON PUBLIC SPEECHES

Burmese President Thein has repealed a draconian law that was used to stifle public speeches and sentence dissidents to lengthy spells in prison under the previous military regime, according to an announcement in a state-owned newspaper published on January 16.

The Burmese-language dailies *Kyemon* and *Myanma-Ahlin* carried an announcement signed by President Thein Sein, which stated he had revoked Law 5/96, or the Law Protecting the Peaceful and Systematic Transfer of State Responsibility and the Successful Performance of the Functions of the National Convention against Disturbances and Oppositions.

It provided for up to 20 years imprisonment for anyone who criticizes the government in speeches or written statements that "belittle the National Convention" and make people misunderstand its proceedings. Enacted in 1996 by the military regime, the law was intended to silence critics of the government's national convention and its preparations to draft a controversial Constitution, which was completed in 2008. It also intended to keep exile groups from working against the regime. The harsh law is one of several laws that were used by the junta's State Peace and Development Council in past decades to use the judiciary to crush dissent. Several similar laws still remain in effect.¹¹

MILITARY STEPS UP STRIKES AGAINST KACHIN STRONGHOLD

The Burmese military continues to intensify its frontline offensive against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) by coordinating ground and air strikes against rebel territories near their stronghold in Laiza.

KIA spokesperson La Nan in speaking to the media on 16 January said Burmese army and air force have been launching coordinated attacks against the KIA's 5th Brigade, about 7 miles west of their headquarters in Laiza.

"The army and the air force are executing a joint operation firing artilleries, missiles and 30mm [cannon]. There is intense fighting taking place in Hkarabon since [Jan 16]," said La Nan.

¹⁰ Transportation industry develops by 15.2 per cent in fourth five-year national plan – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 January 2013 (p.16 & 9)

¹¹ Thein Sein repeals repressive Law on Public Speeches – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/24300> (Irrawaddy) 16 January 2013

On 13 January, Burmese government forces burnt down Khaya and Aungtha villages, outside of Laiza. The KIA claims 60 abandoned houses, whose residents had already fled last year, were destroyed in the attack.

Meanwhile, skirmishes reportedly erupted near the jade fields in western Kachin state's Hpakant township on Tuesday and Wednesday prompting hundreds of residents from nearby villages to flee to Lawng Hkang town for their safety.

According to Tin Soe, chairman of the local NLD party, more than 1,000 refugees have taken shelter in refugee camps, a monastery, communal hall and church in Lawng Hkang since 13 January. Other sources on the ground, say that the Burmese military has deployed nearly 130 battalions, or 20 percent of the country's armed forces, to the restive region.

On 14 January, three civilians were killed and another six injured after Burmese troops launched a series of artillery attacks on Laiza.

The KIA is the only remaining ethnic militia that has yet to sign a ceasefire deal with President Thein Sein's government. Over 75,000 civilians have been displaced since a 17-year truce collapsed in June 2011. The Burmese army claims to be acting in self-defence.¹²

KIA TO TAKE PART IN TALKS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND UNFC

Kachin Independence Army (KIA) will participate in a political meeting scheduled for this year between the government and United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a leader of the 88 Generation Students Group said.

Mya Aye, one of the leaders of the pro-democracy student group, disclosed the information at a press briefing held in Yangon on January 10, after his group's study tour of northern Kachin State from January 3 to 5. KIA said it would take part in talks during the meeting between KIA Major General Gwan Maw and the 88 Generation Group last week, according to Mya Aye. "KIA clearly stated that it would attend the meeting between the Myanmar government and UNFC even if a political dialogue is not possible now as the war escalates," Mya Aye said. KIA still sticks to the policy of political dialogue and is willing to hold talks only if the government reduces its offensive and guarantees political engagement, he added.

The government has offered to hold preliminary talks beginning in mid-January as part of the peace-making efforts together with UNFC, said Min Zaw Oo, director of Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon, on January 6. Armed clashes between the Myanmar army and KIA resumed in June 2011, ending a 17-year ceasefire agreement between two sides. About 2,400 small and large skirmishes had occurred up to December.¹³

CHINA URGES FOR 'PEACEFUL RESOLUTION' TO CONFLICT IN BURMA

China expressed hope for a peaceful resolution to the escalating armed clashes in neighboring Myanmar on Monday between government forces and Kachin Independence Army. Clashes in northern Myanmar resulted in three bombs landing Chinese territory in late December last year. "We hope that the Myanmar government and relevant parties can solve their dispute through peaceful dialogue in order to restore peace and stability in northern Myanmar," said Hong Lei, spokesman of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during a press conference on Monday. Hong also

¹² Military steps up strikes against Kachin stronghold – <http://www.dvb.no/news/military-steps-up-strikes-against-kachin-stronghold/25816> (DVB) 17 January 2013

¹³ KIA to take part in talks between government and UNFC – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/2087-kia-to-take-part-in-talks-between-government-and-unfc> (Eleven News Media) 11 January 2013

said that China has undertaken necessary measures to secure its own border areas and protect Chinese nationals living in the area.¹⁴

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CONDEMNS BURMA'S GOVERNMENT OVER KACHIN CONFLICT

International and local human rights groups have demanded the USA and UK pressure Thein Sein's government to stop the Burma Army's use of air and artillery bombardments against the Kachin.

In the most recent attack on the Kachin town of Laiza the Burma Army fired heavy artillery into civilian areas – killing three and wounding a number of people.

British Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt, speaking on behalf of the UK government in parliament on the 14th of January, expressed deep concern over the escalation in Kachin State “including the use of Burmese military helicopters and aircraft against Kachin Independence Army positions in areas around the state capital and Laiza.”

Alistair Burt called for an immediate cessation in hostilities in Kachin State. “There must be unhindered humanitarian access to conflict affected areas.” Similarly condemnations have also been made by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), an international human rights advocacy group, regarding the recent attacks.¹⁵

SOROS TALKS POLICY REFORM WITH THEIN SEIN, SUU KYI

A Burmese government spokesman said that, American billionaire George Soros could provide technical support to assist the government in implementing policy reforms in Burma. Mr Soros, whose Open Society Institute (OSI) is active in promoting democracy, arrived in Burma (Myanmar) this month for his second visit since the current government came to power.

At a meeting with President U Thein Sein on January 9 in Nay Pyi Taw, Mr Soros discussed changes to economic and media policy in Myanmar. “He said OSI would provide technical support,” presidential spokesman U Ye Htut said. Mr Soros also met Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, 88 Generation student group, the Myanmar Peace Centre and other civil society organizations.

U Hla Maung Shwe from Myanmar Egress said Mr Soros seemed particularly interested in developments in the political, business and education sectors, as well as internal conflict resolution. “This is the first time he's met with such a wide range of people here,” he said. Mr Soros's Open Society Foundations are active in more than 70 countries around the world in support of human rights activities and democracy. “He might provide technical support for the Peace Centre activities, but he didn't go into detail,” said U Hla Maung Shwe, who also a member of the Peace Centre.

U Khun Htun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy Party, said Mr Soros asked about the peace process in Shan State, where the SNLD is planning a peace conference in April. “I briefed him on the peace process in Shan State and mentioned the need for funding, but he made no detailed response about possible support,” he said.¹⁶

ICONIC ACTIVIST MAKES FIRST PEACE-STUDY TOUR ABROAD

Sixteen members of the 88 Generation student's group made their first overseas trip with a visit to the Philippines that began January 14 at the invitation of Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

¹⁴ China urges for 'peaceful resolution' to conflict in neighboring Myanmar – <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/755968.shtml> (Globaltimes) 15 January 2013

¹⁵ International community condemns Burma's government over Kachin conflict – <http://karennews.org/2013/01/international-community-condemns-burmas-government-over-kachin-conflict.html/> (Karen News) 17 January 2013

¹⁶ Soros talks policy reform with Thein Sein, Suu Kyi – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/3785-soros-talks-policy-reform-with-thein-sein-suu-kyi.html> (Myanmar Times) 15 January 2013

(CPCS). During the visit, Min Ko Naing and other 88 Generation leaders will meet a wide range of people, including government officials, military personnel, representatives of peace and conflict studies organisations and other non-governmental organisations, as well as the British Ambassador to the Philippines.

Min Ko Naing said he was eager to observe the situation in the Philippines because, like Myanmar, it had been under military rule for years and he was interested in studying its transition.

“The Philippines is more democratic and transparent than ours is in international cooperation,” said the activist who spent about half of his life in prison. “I will study their transition from military dictatorship to democracy and they also want to know about the problems we faced before and are facing now,” he added.

The CPCS is involved in conflict and peace issues in Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, Orissa and Manipur in India, and Mindanao in the Philippines and its officials either serve as observers to talks and negotiations or as facilitators in preparation and strategy planning of related workshops.¹⁷

ANALYSIS

The request by the Lower House urging the Union-Level Peace Making Committee to resolve on-going conflict in Kachin State is yet again further reflection on the role of parliament in shaping the country’s political scene. The call made by the President to seek a peaceful solution of the conflict has failed thus far, and whether the recent initiative by the Lower House can achieve its objective remains to be seen. Looking at parliament’s recent achievements, it has been successful in adopting laws legalising microfinance, labour unions and peaceful protests. However, more importantly it has slowly emerged as an effective check and balance on the government. Furthermore, it has also become more dynamic and able to avoid being a mere rubber-stamping institution as was the case of past legislative bodies.

Most significantly, the on-going Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) session witnessed the President’s proposed comments on the Constitutional Tribunal over-ruled and voted down. It follows months of disagreements between the union parliament and government over the role of Burma’s constitutional tribunal and ending in the dismissal of all nine judges last September after the parliament voted to impeach them. These distinct and yet crucial undertakings by parliament demonstrates the maturing of Burma’s nascent democracy. And the question that now remains is, if those involved in the fighting will heed to the call by the Lower House. Whatever, the outcome maybe, the need for peace remains a priority without which Burma’s democratic transition will remain fragile and elusive.

¹⁷ Iconic activist makes first peace-study tour abroad – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/2135-iconic-activist-makes-first-peace-study-tour-abroad> (Eleven News Media) 15 January 2013/
Peace and pedagogy for 88 Generation in Philippines – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/3792-peace-and-pedagogy-for-88-generation-in-philippines.html> (Myanmar Times) 16 January 2013

APPENDICES

Appendix A: LOWER HOUSE MAKES REQUEST TO PEACE-MAKING CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO END KACHIN CONFLICT

Pyithu Hluttaw makes request to Union Peace-making Central Committee, KIO/KIA

Pyithu Hluttaw made a request to Union Peacemaking Central Committee and KIO/KIA at the second day sixth regular session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw on 11 January, 2013. The following is the translation of the request made by Pyithu Hluttaw.

1. Every second touches us with sadness for local people of Kachin state who have to suffer the by-products of war daily and loss of both sides due to ongoing armed conflicts there.
2. Myanmar has been moving towards a goal of democracy that places the aspiration of the people at fore. Today is not the time to claim at gunpoint and neither to reject with the power of gun. Without a negotiation process, armed conflicts in Kachin State will never come to an end. It is learnt that there have been difficulties to hold talks between the members of peace-making group of the government and representatives of KIO/KIA national race armed group as military action intensifies in the region at present. So peace and stability is more and more out of reach and local people have to live amidst great fear and suffer untold miseries being stuck in the military preparations of the two forces.
3. So, Pyithu Hluttaw would like to urge Union Peace-making Central Committee and KIO/KIA to publicize the electronic online negotiation, making their discussions transparent, while responsible persons of both sides find it difficult to enter to the negotiation table during the period of tension in Kachin State and to build trust through the negotiation paying heed to the voices of the people to be able to ease the military tensions and to pave the way for the lasting peace.

Sd/ Thura Shwe Mann
Speaker
Pyithu Hluttaw¹⁸

Appendix B: LOWER HOUSE CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE, RESUMPTION OF PEACE TALKS

Pyithu Hluttaw at its today's session urged immediately to end the fighting in Kachin State and to resume peace negotiations possibly soonest to establish internal peace. The following is the full text of Pyithu Hluttaw's announcement.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Pyithu Hluttaw

Nay Pyi Taw

Date: 18 January 2013

Pyithu Hluttaw calls for immediately stopping exchange of fire between KIO/KIA and the government troops in Kachin State and to go back to negotiation table as soon as possible to establish internal peace.

1. Pyithu Hluttaw Representative Daw Dwe Bu from M'Jangyang Constituency of Kachin State submitted an urgent proposal to discuss an urgent issue under Section 133 of Pyithu Hluttaw Bylaw at the third day sixth regular session of the first Pyithu Hluttaw (18-1-2013).
2. It was an urgent proposal urging Pyithu Hluttaw to approve the proposal urging responsible organizations and the Union government to immediately stop exchange of fire between KIO/KIA and the government troops in Kachin State and to go back to negotiation table as

¹⁸ Pyithu Hluttaw makes request to Union Peace-making Central Committee, KIO/KIA – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 January 2013 (p. 1)

soon as possible to establish internal peace and all Pyithu Hluttaw representatives approved it without objection.

3. The Pyithu Hluttaw, therefore, urges responsible organizations and the Union government to immediately stop exchange of fire between KIO/KIA and the government troops in Kachin State and to go back to negotiation table as soon as possible to establish internal peace.

Sd/ Thura Shwe Mann
Speaker
Pyithu Hluttaw¹⁹

¹⁹ Pyithu Hluttaw calls for ceasefire, resumption of peace talks –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2013-01-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 January 2013 (p.1)