
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 22

OFFICIAL MEDIA

LAOTIAN PM MEETS PRESIDENT & HLUTTAW SPEAKERS

Prime Minister of Lao People's Democratic Republic Thongsing Thammavong was received in Nay Pyi Taw on 11 July by President U Thein Sein. The President praised the Laotian government and people for the recent successful election and formation of new government in Lao PDR, and the Prime Minister invited the President to attend the next Asia-Europe Summit in late November 2012 which Laos will host. They also discussed developments in both countries and exchanged views on bilateral relations, security cooperation along Mekong Basin, border region peace and stability, seeking ways to promote bilateral trade, bilateral cooperation in culture, tourism, religious affairs and education, mutual cooperation in international and regional issues and ways to promote the existing friendly relations. They also exchanged views on the efforts of Lao PDR for the success of poverty alleviation and rural development in accord with 2015 UN Millennium Development Goals and transforming the nation into an industrialized one in 2020 and Myanmar's efforts for implementation of the eight tasks for rural development and poverty alleviation.¹

In addition, the Laotian Prime Minister and his entourage also called on the Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann as well as the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw U Khin Maung Myint on 11 July.²

UNION MINISTER U AUNG KYI AND DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI MEET

Union Minister for Labour and for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Aung Kyi and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi held a meeting in Rangoon for over an hour on 25 July. After the meeting, the Minister briefed correspondents of local and foreign news agencies regarding his discussions with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and issued the following press release:³

At the invitation of the government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called on Union Minister U Aung Kyi at Seinle Kantha State House from 1 pm to 2.10 pm on 25 July 2011. The two sides are optimistic about and satisfied with the dialogue. They held talks about opportunities for both sides to work together for well-being of the public. The discussions included matters for the rule of law, elimination of disagreement, and serving national interest. They also agreed that they will meet again at a mutually convenient time.

UEC APPROVES NEW POLITICAL PARTY AND CONSIDERS APPLICATION OF ANOTHER

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has approved an application submitted by Dr Than Htaik Oo and 16 others to form the People Democracy Party (PDP) on 20 July. Similarly, U Ohn Lwin and a group of 16 have recently submitted their application to register the Party for Unity and Peace (PUP)

¹ Laotian PM's visit will further strengthen existing friendship, cooperation between Myanmar and Laos - President U Thein Sein / New government under President's leadership will bring fruitful results to Myanmar people and make greater contribution to international and regional peace, stability and development cooperation - Laotian PM Mr. Thongsing Thammavong - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 July 2011 (p. 1 + 8) & President U Thein Sein welcomes visiting Laotian Prime Minister Mr. Thongsing Thammavong - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 July 2011 (p. 16)

² Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets Laotian PM - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-12.pdf>(NLM) 12 July 2011 (p. 7)

³ Union Minister U Aung Kyi and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi issue press release - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 July 2011 (p. 16 + 9)

to the Elections Commission in accordance with the provisions of Article-4 and Article-5 of Political Parties Registration Law. In the November 2010 elections, U Ohn Lwin headed the National Political Alliance League and fielded 13 candidates in Ayeyarwaddy, Magway, Mandalay and Yangon regions but did not win any seats.⁴

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

FIVE MILITARY GENERALS UNDER INVESTIGATION IN NAY PYI TAW

Five top military generals from the Burmese army, suspected of corruption and exploiting their positions, have been questioned by Commander-in-Chief Gen Min Aung Hlaing in Nay Pyi Taw. According to military sources, those under investigation include: Maj-Gen Kyaw Phyoo, the Adjutant-General of the Army; Maj-Gen Khin Zaw Oo, the Chairman of the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (UMEHL); Maj-Gen Myint Soe, one of the commanders of the Bureau of Special Operations (BSO); Brig-Gen Than Tun Oo, the Commander of the Triangle Regional Military Command; and Brig-Gen Khin Maung Htay, the Commander of the Coastal Regional Military Command.

“Myint Soe was involved in corruption regarding the sale of land when he was commander of Northwest Regional Military Command. At that time, Thar Aye, the current prime minister of Sagaing Division, complained about the matter in a letter to the president,” said a military source. The generals under investigation are still on active duty. A second military source said that if no strong evidence emerges, the generals will get away with just a warning. Military observers said that, if the accused generals are dismissed, Min Aung Hlaing will probably hand their positions to generals close to him. “As commander-in-chief, it is expected that he will offer important positions to those he trusts,” an observer said. “Building power and mandate is a tradition within the Tatmadaw [Burmese armed forces].” According to military sources, Min Aung Hlaing is working under the direct instruction of Senior-General Than Shwe.⁵

ETHNIC LEADERS PRESENT CEASE-FIRE PROPOSAL TO EU

At a recent meeting held in Bangkok on 9 July, several ethnic leaders are reported to have requested EU officials to broker a political dialogue between the government and the ethnic groups regarding the on-going conflicts in eastern Burma. Leaders of an umbrella group of ethnic parties, the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC), told the European delegation that Burmese government forces had attacked the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in northern Burma last month in a bid to protect Nay Pyi Taw’s business interests with China, said UNFC Secretary Nai Hang Thar. Nai Hang Thar, who is also secretary of the New Mon State Party, said the UNFC representatives had told the EU that thousands of refugees have been created as a result of the armed conflict. “The ethnic leaders requested the EU to help them find solutions to the problems in Burma through political dialogue,” he said.

The UNFC Also presented EU officials with a proposal for the formation of a federal union in Burma. The UNFC was formed earlier this year in February at a meeting in northern Thailand and was established by the following ethnic groups: Chin National Front (CNF), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Kachin National Organization (KNO), Karen National Union (KNU), Karenni

⁴ Establishment of political parties scrutinized, permitted - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 July 2011 (p. 8) /

Application for formation of political party scrutinized - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-07-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 July 2011 (p. 2)

⁵ Five military generals under investigation on Nay Pyi Taw - http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21789 (Irrawaddy) 28 July 2011

National Progressive Party (KNPP), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), National Unity Party of Arakan (UNPA), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), Shan State Progress Party / Shan State Army (SSPP / SSA) and the Wa National Organization (WNO).⁶

SUU KYI'S "OPEN LETTER" CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE IN ETHNIC AREAS

Aung San Suu Kyi made her first open entreaty on 28 July, urging Burmese government troops and ethnic armed groups to stop fighting as soon as possible and to solve problems by using peaceful ways. The open letter, signed by Suu Kyi and addressed to President Thein Sein, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Shan State Army (SSA), urged all those involved for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution of the conflicts for promoting the well-being of all nationalities in the country. The following is the unofficial translation of the letter.⁷

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S "OPEN LETTER" TO PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION.

To:

- (1) U Thein Sein, President, Union of Myanmar
- (2) Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)
- (3) Karen National Union (KNU)
- (4) New Mon State Army (NMSP)
- (5) Shan State Army (SSA)

28 July 2011

The (post-independence) Union of Burma was co-founded by different nationalities. Like siblings from a single family, all these nationalities had co-habited this land since time immemorial. Therefore, forging peaceful ties and unity among the nationalities is of paramount importance.

Of late, there have been news stories about military conflicts between the country's Armed Forces and the armed nationalities groups in various regions such as the Kachin, the Shan, the Karen, the Mon and so on. These conflicts are resulting in tragic outcomes such as loss of life, destruction of costly physical infrastructures and economic projects and a condition of general deterioration. Besides causing enormous suffering among local communities, these conflicts come with a potential risk of spilling over and spreading across Burma's immediate neighbourhoods.

The use of force to resolve the conflicts is only going to be mutually harmful to all parties concerned. National reconciliation and unity cannot be built on might. It can only be pursued through political negotiations. Only through political negotiations can genuine national unity be established. Only such unity among nationalities can guarantee the country's (peaceful) future. In the absence of genuine peace and reconciliation the potential spread of civil war always lurks beneath.

Conflicts among nationalities can surely be resolved on the basis of mutual respect and mutual understanding, leading ultimately to the Union's peace and stability. Only when the Union is genuinely peaceful and stable can nation-building programmes be implemented successfully. Therefore, with the sole purpose of promoting the well being of all nationalities in the land I call for immediate cease-fires and the peaceful resolution of the conflicts.

⁶ Ethnic leaders present cease-fire proposal to EU - http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21693 (Irrawaddy) 14 July 2011

⁷ Suu Kyi's "Open Letter" calls for immediate cease-fire in ethnic areas - <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5691-suu-kyis-open-letter-calls-for-immediate-cease-fire-in-ethnic-areas.html> (Mizzima) 28 July 2011

On my part, I am prepared, and pledge, to do everything in my power towards the cessation of armed conflicts and building peace in the Union.

Signed,

Aung San Suu Kyi

54/56 University Avenue, Rangoon.

SUU KYI PRESSURED TO REGISTER PARTY DURING TALKS

Burmese Labour Minister Aung Kyi has urged pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to legally register her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), during their recent meeting held at the State Guest House in Yangon on 25 July. However, sources close to the NLD said that Suu Kyi rejected the suggestion, because the NLD did not accept the 2008 Constitution, and accordingly the rules and regulations laid down for party registrations. In 2010, prior to the November elections, the NLD lost its legal status on 6 May for failing to re-register and boycotted the polls which it deemed as unfair and undemocratic. Following Suu Kyi's release from house arrest last year, less than a week after the 7 November elections, the NLD took the case concerning its legal standing to court four times. However, Nay Pyi Taw's Supreme Court dismissed the NLD's special appeal against dissolution early this year. Since then, the NLD has decided to submit a letter of appeal to the UN Human Rights Council to challenge the government's efforts to eliminate Burma's most influential political party.⁸

UEC MEETS ALL REGISTERED POLITICAL PARTIES, CHAIRMAN URGES ALL TO OPPOSE WESTERN SANCTIONS

Union Election Commission (UEC) chairman Tin Aye has urged all 37 registered political parties to take part in working for the lifting of sanctions imposed on Burma by foreign countries at a meeting held in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 July. He said that the sanctions did not have an impact on the government and its business associates but they harmed common people, said Democratic Party (Myanmar) (DPM) chairman Thu Wei. According to Thu Wei, Tin Aye said these sanctions are hurdles and obstacles to the economic development of the country. Tin Aye said Western countries imposed these sanctions, noting that while some said that it affected government and businessmen only, this was not true. The UEC chairman told the political parties to follow the electoral laws and rules enacted in early March 2010. He said that political parties would be dissolved if they accept members of exile-based unlawful associations. Each political party delegate was allowed two minutes to comment during the meeting.

A Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) delegate proposed that ethnic party representatives be involved in peace talks with armed ethnic groups that are fighting government troops, Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) Chairman Dr. Aye Maung said, adding that "The delegate proposed the inclusion of all ethnic parties in these peace talks but the UEC chairman said that the election commission could not do it and told them to present the issue to parliament." The proposal was endorsed by the Chin, Inn, Phalon-Sawaw and Rakhine ethnic parties. RNDP leader, Aye Maung suggested that more meetings are needed and that delegates should be given more time to present their views.

The 10-party Friends of Democracy presented a paper to the UEC which discussed the weaknesses and rampant vote rigging in the past election. The group includes the National Democratic Front (NDF), Democracy and Peace Party, Union Democracy Party and ethnic parties representing the Karen, Shan, Mon, Chin and Rakhine groups. "In our joint paper we said the electoral laws and rules

⁸ Suu Kyi pressured to register party during talks - http://irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21782 (Irrawaddy) 27 July 2011

in the last general election were violated. We urged them to avoid these malpractices and to remedy them. And we urged them not to take absentee votes and to conduct vote counting only in the presence of the vote observers. He said that he had already read the paper and promised to make changes," Aye Maung said.⁹

On 25 July, the All Mon Region Democratic Party (AMRDP) party chairman announced that the party had selected two delegates to meet with the Union Election Commission (UEC) on 27 July - Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein and Nai Hla Khaing, a member of AMRDP's Central Executive Committee – adding that the AMRDP were submitting a report to the UEC regarding irregularities of the last elections held in 2010 in which it won 16 seats out of 34 it contested. The AMRDP has two members serving as ministers within the Mon State government as well as two other ministerial positions in the Kayin State government.¹⁰

ALLIED OPPOSITION PARTIES PREPARE TO FIELD CANDIDATES

The National Democratic Force (NDF) will field candidates in all available constituencies in the forthcoming Burmese by-elections to increase opposition forces in Parliament. Forty constituencies across the country will hold elections; however, the dates have not yet been announced. In the 2010 general election, the government-sanctioned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won a total of 882 constituencies out of 1,154. Other political parties won a total of 272 seats. "We will contest in all available seats. Our pro-democracy forces are very weak in Parliament," said NDF party chairman Dr. Than Nyein. Democratic Party (Myanmar) (DP-M) General-Secretary Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein said it would field two candidates, party leaders Thu Wei and Nay Yi Ba Swe. The NDF, DP-M, Democracy and Peace Party, Union Democracy Party and 10 ethnic political parties representing Karen, Shan, Mon, Chin, Rakhine have given a candidate list to contest in the 40 vacant seats, according to the group's Friends of Democracy By-election Work Committee. The goal is to marshal their forces and not to weaken each party's chances of winning a constituency. The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) said that it will contest in 15 seats and would consult with the NDF party to avoid vote division, said party General-Secretary Sai Hla Kyaw. The joint committee said it would provide poll watchers to monitoring voting with the intention to prevent the rampant vote rigging and other irregularities that occurred in the 2010 election. Than Nyein said voting irregularities and other issues would be presented to the Union Election Commission (UEC) scheduled to take place in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 July 2011.¹¹

MON LEADERS CALL ON DAW SUU TO EXPLAIN MORE ABOUT DISCUSSIONS WITH LABOUR MINISTER

A Mon political leader from the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) says if democracy icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains silent and has no will to inform the public about her discussion with the Labour Minister of the new government in Burma, there can be no good results. AMDP Chairperson Nai Ngwe Thein said "The people have desires, and they want to know what the discussions are about. She should explain to the people, and then they can know. By this way, it can benefit the people. Without explanation, there will be no benefit." National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi met with Union Minister for Labour, Social Service, Relief and Resettlement U Aung Kyi on 25 July. Immediately after the meeting, U Aung Kyi issued a press

⁹ EC chairman urges all political parties to oppose western sanctions - <http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5686-ec-chairman-urges-all-political-parties-to-oppose-western-sanctions.html> (Mizzima) 27 July 2011

¹⁰ Mon party delegates to join Election Commission meeting - <http://monnews.org/?p=3277> (Mon News Agency) 25 July 2011

¹¹ Allied opposition parties prepare to field candidates - <http://www.mizzima.com/news/election-2010-/5677-allied-opposition-parties-prepare-to-field-candidates.html> (Mizzima) 27 July 2011

statement in which he described the discussions as related to the rule of law, reconciliation and benefits to the people. (*See full text above.*) He also added that the government has plans to hold more meetings with the opposition leader. However, a Mon politician stated that neither the government nor the NLD explained anything to the people on the outcome or contents of the meeting. In responding to questions to the media, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also said that if the meetings could result in benefit to the people, she would continue to participate in future talks. Before this meeting, Minister U Aung Kyi and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have met nine times between 2007 and 2010.¹²

FIVE ETHNIC POLITICAL PARTIES WANT PEACE COMMISSION

Five ethnic political parties have proposed the formation of a Peace Commission (PC) to restore peace in Burma at a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 July. The proposal was promoted by Chairman of the Chin National Party Mr. Zo Zam as well as representative of the five ethnic brotherhoods at a meeting of political representatives and the Union Election Commission (UEC) (*see more on this above*). "There is need for restoration of peace in our country. We (five ethnic brothers) want to form a Peace Commission, so we submitted our proposal to the Union Election Commission. We hope that commission takes cognizance given our country's situation," said Mr. Zo Zam. The CNP chair also added that in order for peace to prevail, a third person mediator would be required for negotiations to resolve the on-going conflicts. The five parties include the Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party, the Chin National Party (CNP), the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) and the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP).¹³

USDP LOOKS TO BOLSTER EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), Burma's military-backed ruling party, is bolstering its membership by awarding salaries to township, district and state and regional-level executive committee (EC) members. The salaries of the EC members will depend on their level, according to USDP Rangoon Division EC members. The USDP has also reshuffled its 17-member Central Executive Committee (CEC), adding a number of prominent members of the government to its ranks, including Thura Shwe Mann, the speaker of the Lower House of the Burmese legislature, who is now the USDP's vice chairman. Other new members on the party's CEC are Aung Thuang, the former minister for industry (1); Thein Zaw, the former Minister of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs; and Soe Thar, the former Minister of Planning and Development. Meanwhile, U Thuang, the former Minister for Science and Technology, has been named Party Secretary, taking over the position from Htay Oo, who has become General-Secretary. "Executive members at the township level will receive between 60,000 and 80,000 kyat (US \$75-\$100) per month. District-level members will receive between 10,000 and 20,000 kyat (\$12.50-\$25)," said a Rangoon Division EC member. The awarding of salaries to EC members is aimed at attracting more people to become members, said observers. After the 2010 election, the USDP promoted its ward-level EC members to township level, giving them more authority than township-level administrators. Members of the USDP are also recruiting university students and other educated young people by offering would-be candidates incentives and various privileges. The activities are part of the USDP's strategy as it prepares to contest the by-elections scheduled for later this year.¹⁴

¹² Mon leaders call on Daw Suu to explain more about discussions with Labour Minister - <http://monnews.org/?p=3284> (IMNA) 26 July 2011

¹³ Five ethnic political parties want Peace Commission - <http://khonumthung.org/?p=176> (Khonumthung) 28 July 2011

¹⁴ USDP looks to bolster executive membership - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21675 (Irrawaddy) 12 July 2011

ANALYSIS

The call by ethnic leaders as well as by opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to resolve the on-going fighting taking place between the government forces and ethnic groups further highlights the importance of the national reconciliation process that is needed in Burma. While attempts to end the fighting are taking place, many of those in the conflict areas have been forced to flee to the borders and some even into neighbouring countries. In recent years, such movements of displaced persons have created and led to misunderstandings between Burma and its neighbours China, India, Bangladesh and Thailand.

The new administration is now faced with allegations of corruption by five high-ranking generals within the leadership. While the investigations are still ongoing, some observers think that this could yet prove to be a repetition of the 2004 events when former Prime Minister and Military Intelligence Chief General Khin Nyunt was removed from office on corruption charges. The present investigations are being conducted by a Than Shwe confidante and loyalist Min Aung Hlaing, the current Commander-in-Chief, who in recent months has dismissed Rangoon Regional Command Brig-Gen Tun Than and former Chief of Bureau of Special Operations Major-General Tin Ngwe citing corruption charges. While Thein Sein's administration has vowed to adopt and implement "a clean government campaign", the recent dismissals carried out thus far have been taken by the Defence Services Chief, Min Aung Hlaing. Thus it raises questions the real motives behind the removals.

The recent appointment of Major-General Soe Shein, a son-in-law and personal aide of the former strongman Than Shwe, as Chief of Military Intelligence may indicate that the reign of the former military dictator is far from over.

How the civilian government of President U Thein Sein handles the ethnic question and how the corruption investigations turn out will indicate if more changes can be expected or if the situation will return to the status quo that prevailed under Senior-General Than Shwe.