

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.6

OFFICIAL MEDIA

UNION LEVEL PEACE MAKING COMMITTEE HOLDS PEACE TALKS WITH KIO

Peace talks between the government and KIO was held in Shweli on 4 February. The KIO five-member team was led by U Samlut [ung Lyut] Gam and General Gun [Gwan]. After the meeting the two sides issued the following joint statement:

1. Talks between a delegation led by Vice-Chairman of Union Level Peace-Making Committee Union Minister U Aung Min and KIO negotiation team, was held in Shweli of Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China from 9 am to 16:15 pm today.
2. Ambassador Mr Luo Zhaohui of Foreign Affairs Ministry of the PRC, KNU Chairman General Saw Mutu Sae Poe, General Secretary Pado Saw Kwe Htoo Win and one member, Brig-Gen Sai Lu of RCSS/SSA and two members, U Harn Yawngnhe and U Victor Biak Lian, have attended the talks as witnesses.
3. Talks focused on establishing communication channels, reducing military tension, preparing for next talks and the invitation of observers and organizations as witnesses in the next meeting.
4. KIO has agreed to hold the next talks before the end of February after making coordination with UNFC and to continue holding the political talks between the government and KIO.
5. Both sides have agreed to continue to hold talks for emergence of a surveillance system in the conflict-affected areas for achieving ceasefire swiftly between the government and KIO.

4 February, 2013
Shweli.¹

UNSG HOPES SILENCING OF THE GUNS IN MYANMAR FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ITS INDEPENDENCE

Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr Ban Ki-moon issued a statement about negotiation between the government and KIO in Shweli on 4 February. He welcomed the talks and urged both parties to continue efforts towards genuine and sustainable peace in Kachin State. He said that he hoped that the latest developments would result in silencing of the guns in Burma for the first time since its independence. Special Advisor to the UNSG Mr Vijay Nambia visited the IDP camps together with government officials in Kachin State and met civil society organizations and stakeholders. He said the United Nations remains committed to continuing to extend all necessary help and support to the people of Myanmar, including through its good offices and the country team.²

NORWAY WELCOMES AGREEMENT ON KACHIN TALKS

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway Espen Barth Eide welcomed the Kachin talks and said that it was encouraging news for him. The Minister of Foreign Affairs said that it was a historic opportunity to bring about peace and called on the government and KIO to allow humanitarian aid to reach the conflict-affected population.³

¹ Union Level Peace Making Committee holds peace talks with KIO –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 February 2013 (p. 1)/
Government to continue assisting IDPs –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/72newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 February 2013 (p.1)

² UNSG hopes silencing of the guns in Burma for the first time since its independence –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 February 2013 (p. 1)

³ Norway welcomes agreement on Kachin talks –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 February 2013 (p. 1)/
Press Release: Agreement on Kachin talks encouraging –

BURMA, AUSTRIA TO COOPERATE IN EDUCATION SECTOR

Burmese President Thein Sein received a delegation led by Dr Christoph Leitl, President of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce in Naypyitaw on 1 February. At the call, the two sides exchanged views on establishing fair and genuine partnership for long-term interests of both sides, mutual trust, qualified vocational training courses, EU's grant of GSP rights to Burma and cooperation in energy and environmental conservation, food security, education, health, banking services, finance and technology. The Austrian delegation also met the Minister for Cooperatives U Kyaw Hsan and held discussions on cooperation between the two countries to upgrade existing Cooperative Degree Colleges/Universities under the Ministry and provide teaching aids and course instructors for vocational training courses in Burma.⁴

BURMESE PRESIDENT RECEIVES WORLD BANK DELEGATION

A high-level delegation led by International Finance Corporation (IFC) Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer Mr. Jin- Yong Cai from the World Bank called on Burmese President Thein Sein on 4 February at the President's Office in Naypyitaw and discussed matters related to Burma's agriculture, health, education, electric power sectors and sharing of experience in public finance and rural area development with the assistance of the World Bank. Mr Cai and party also met with Speaker of the Lower House Thura Shwe Mann, government ministers and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society, academia and development institutions. The delegation agreed to support Burma in meeting its urgent need for electric power and in improving the telecommunications and banking sectors.⁵

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RECEIVES CHAIRMAN OF TOKYO-BASED KEIDENREN (JAPAN BUSINESS FEDERATION) AND PARTY

President Thein Sein received a Japanese delegation led by Chairman Mr. Hiromasa Yonekura of Tokyo-based KEIDENREN (Japan Business Federation) on 5 February discussed human resource and infrastructural development in Burma, natural disaster prevention and environmental conservation, cooperation in technology, energy, agriculture, livestock breeding, mining, communications technology and foodstuff production, cooperation in electric power generation through modern Japanese technology and cooperation in industrial sectors through long-term and short-term plans. Mr Yonekura and party also met the Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) Thura U Shwe Mann and discussed promoting and strengthening of bilateral ties between the two countries.⁶

http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/press/news/2013/kachin_talks.html?id=713379 (Norwegian Foreign Ministry) – 4 February 2013

⁴ Burma, Austria to cooperate in education sector –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 February 2013 (p. 1)/

Burma, Austria discuss upgrading of cooperative universities, extension of vocational training courses –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 February 2013 (p. 8)

⁵ President U Thein Sein receives Executive Vice-President and CEO of International Finance Corporation (IFC) from World Bank –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 February 2013 (p.1)/

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann receives guests from World Bank –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 February 2013 (p. 9)/

Union EP Minister, Vice President and CEO of IFC discuss cooperation in development of electric power –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/62newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 February 2013 (p. 8)/

Press Release: World Bank Group to Support Myanmar's Plan to Improve People's Access to Electricity –

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/02/05/World-Bank-Group-to-Support-Myanmar-8217-s-Plan-to-Improve-People-8217-s-Access-to-Electricity> (World Bank) 5 February 2013

⁶ President U Thein Sein receives Chairman of Tokyo-based KEIDENREN (Japan Business Federation) and party –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/62newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 February 2013 (p. 1)/

Burma, Japan focus on further cooperation in investment and economic sectors –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/62newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 February 2013 (p. 8)

COMMITTEE FORMED TO REVIEW REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS

The President's Office issued a statement on 2 February in which it gave instructions to form a committee to scrutinize the remaining political prisoners serving their terms in prisons throughout the country so as to grant them liberty. The committee is reportedly to be chaired by Union Minister at the President Office U Soe Thane and to be constituted with representatives from government ministries, civil society organizations and some political parties. The committee will define the meaning of prisoners of conscience and coordinate for a set of framework for releasing and scrutinize the remaining political prisoners and report the findings to the President.⁷

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 12th day meeting on 1st February. During the session ten questions were raised and answered. The key issue discussed included the following:

- U Tin Maung Oo of Shwepyitha Constituency (USDP) called for explanation of **the cause of Heho plane crash and the measures put in place to prevent recurrence of such accidents**. Deputy Minister for Transport U Han Sein replied that **the F-100 of Air Bagan crashed while landing to Heho Airport on 25 December 2012; and a five-member investigation commission has been formed to investigate the crash**. MP U Tin Maung Oo also stated that as the government has enacted the FDI law, more foreign investors would come into the country and to that end it is necessary for the authorities to provide these visitors with safe transport facilities. He also requested the Deputy Minister to provide details on the condition of airports, planes and pilots under the administration of the Myanmar Airways.
- The Hluttaw session approved the Bill Amending the Law on Emoluments, Allowances and Facilities of Region/State level personalities and the bill on securities exchange as amended by Amyotha Hluttaw. As regards the first bill, U Win Oo of Yebyu Constituency (USDP) said "National races affairs ministers from regions and states need to have the same rights and power like other ministers, and welcomed the approval to amend the existing law
- The Hluttaw Speaker informed the session on nominating the **Director-General of Supreme Court of the Union (Retd) U Mya Thein, Barrister U Mya Thein and Barrister U Myint Lwin to the President as candidates for the reconstitution of the Constitutional Tribunal**.⁸

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 13th day meeting on 4th February. During today's meeting, six questions were answered and one bill was approved. The key issues discussed and approved included the following:

- **The Disaster Management Bill** was approved by the session. Before the bill was approved, amended paragraphs and sub-paragraphs of the bill were discussed by Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee, two representatives and Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Phone Swe. The bill approved for the **formation of a national committee and regional organizations to mobilize the entire people to actively participate in cooperation with INGOs and NGOs at home and abroad in disaster preparedness tasks, rescue and rehabilitation, environmental conservation tasks in the aftermath of disasters**.

⁷ Committee to be formed to grant liberty to remaining political prisoners – <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/briefing-room/news/2013/02/07/id-1539> (President's Office, Burma) 2 February 2013

⁸ MP voices concern for safety and potential of air transport – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 February 2013 (p. 9)

- U Soe Paing of Wuntho Constituency (USDP) asked three questions: **if there were any gold or precious mineral mining by fraud though application for the mining are mentioned to extract low-tax minerals, if there any plan, inspection or directives to be able to avoid such kinds of frauds, and if there any plan to allow manageable-level gold panning.** In responding, Union Minister for Mines Dr Myint Aung stated that Geological Survey and Minerals Exploration Department of the ministry carried out laboratory tests for the minerals exploration and the ministry granted permission for mining according to the report on the exploration and possibility; the ministry held joint-management committee meetings every four month and supervised the mining companies and those who closely supervised the mines had to report on the inspection of the mines to do away with the frauds. The ministry could allow manageable-level gold panning in accordance with the Section 10 of the Myanmar Mining Law, he said. However, the ministry had banned the manageable level gold panning as small and medium machinery were used in the manageable-level gold panning, destroying the environment and without supplying gold to the State, he added. There were a total of 2539 blocks of manageable-level gold panning across the country. The ministry decided to ban the manageable-level gold mining on 15 February, 2012, in order to carry out gold mining in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Myanmar Mining Law, to encourage the environmental conservation and to save the river system, to get correct figures for gold extraction, to reduce hazardous impacts from gold mining, to control use of machinery in gold mining and to control the labour problems. Still the Ministry has not yet allowed the manageable-level gold mining in the country.⁹

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 14th day meeting on 5th February. During the session, 10 proposals and six questions were answered, one report submitted and one bill approved. The key issues discussed and approved included the following:

- **The Bill Amending the Penal Code** submitted by the Supreme Court of the Union was approved without amendment by the session;
- Daw Khin Htay Kywe, a member of the bill committee of Pyithu Hluttaw, submitted a **report on the bill revoking the emergency provisions and interests limitation act**. The Act was enacted in 1950, and the act number 19 includes 4 sections. As it is not in conformity with the current age, the act is considered to be revoked;
- U Sai Thein Aung of Tachilek constituency (SNDP) on behalf of U Ye Tun of Hsipaw constituency (SNDP), asked **why some people were arrested at the play-ground which was legally opened at Sanmarlar Garden in the municipal area of Hsipaw township.** Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Chief of Myanmar Police Force Brig- Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun replied: **U Tun Yi, In-charge of the game station opened at the playground was summoned for two times and warned not to allow gambling at the game station. Acting on tip-off which says the game station continued to allow computer ized-system of gambling attracting students and governmental employees, Shan State Police Force sent a special squad there on 17 December and arrested eight gamblers playing at six game machines, out of 21, and the manager of the station along with K 210,800. Hsipaw Township Development Affairs Committee has granted permission to set up the playground for public recreation. However, the gambling at the game station of the playground is not illegal, hindering the development of the country and causing poverty and damaging the morality of the people,** he said.¹⁰

⁹ Pyithu Hluttaw approves Disaster Management Bill – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 February 2013 (p. 16)

¹⁰ Pyithu Hluttaw approves Bill Amending the Penal Code – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/62newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 February 2013 (p. 16)

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 15th day meeting on 6th February. During the session, six questions were raised and replied and one proposal and one bill submitted. The key issues discussed and approved included the following:

- U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency (NDF) submitted the proposal urging the Union government to **prescribe a special law that can protect the citizens in order that actions can be taken against those who abuse the power regarding movable properties and immovable properties to fully enjoy the rights described in the Constitution.** In responding, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Chief of Myanmar Police Force Brig- Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun and Deputy Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo stated that relevant laws have been enacted to protect citizens and called for the proposal to be recorded by the session;
- Member of Bill Committee U Khin Maung Shwe read out the **Chemicals and Precursors Bill** submitted by the Deputy Minister for Industry.¹¹

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 16th day meeting on 7th February. During the session, **six questions were raised and one proposal** submitted. The key proposal submitted during the session included:

- U Thura U Aung Ko of Kanpetlet Constituency (USDP) submitted a proposal on **urging the government to conserve High Court (Yangon) and Combined Office between Strand Road and Bank Road in Yangon as ancient cultural heritage sites.**¹²

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 12th day meeting on 1st February. During the session five questions were raised and answered, one bill approved and two proposals submitted. Key issues included the following:

- U Paul Htan Htaing of Chin State Constituency No.3 (CNP) raised the questions on whether **current regions and former divisions, “Wa” Self-Administered Division and its former status, and Regions and States had the same definitions and meaning.** In responding Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint said that according to the Constitution, **the status of current regions and former regions are exactly the same. “Wa” Self-Administered Division is not same as its former status while the Regions and States still maintain the same status.**
- **The Minimum Wage Bill (2012)** was also approved at the session.¹³

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 13th day meeting on 4th February. During the session five questions were raised and answered, one bill approved and two proposals submitted. Key issues included the following:

- Dr Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No.8 (USDP) asked **if there are policies and laws for concerning Burmese migrant workers.** In response to the question, Union Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security U Maung Myint said that the **existing Overseas Employment Law (1999) is being amended for Myanmar migrant workers so as to have equal rights as domestic workers. Plans are under way to approve Migrant Working Policy (draft). Five-year National Level Migrant Working Policy Plan (draft) is being formulated. Skill development of**

¹¹ Proposal on promulgating a special law to protect citizens in order that actions can be taken against those who abuse the power regarding movable properties and immovable properties recorded – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/72newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 February 2013 (p. 1)

¹² Urgent proposal on conserving High Court (Yangon) and Combined Office as ancient cultural heritages submitted – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 February 2013 (p. 16)

¹³ Amyotha Hluttaw approves Minimum Wage Bill (2012) – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 February 2013 (p. 9)

Myanmar workers are being carried out for protecting the interests of workers. Alien Worker Law is also being drafted for systematic acceptance of foreign workers;

- Chairman of Public Complaints and Appeal Committee U Aung Nyein of Magway Region Constituency No. 2 (USDP) submitted the proposal on **urging the Union government to ensure officials from every level of administrative bodies follow rules and regulations for emergence of clean government and good governance and to take stern actions against law breakers and to scrutinize the lack of complaints by the government staff for expulsion from their jobs.** The Hluttaw session decided to record Union government's undertakings regarding above proposal.¹⁴

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 14th day meeting on 5th February. During the session four questions were raised and answered, two draft bills discussed and one proposal submitted. Key issues included the following:

- U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency No.6 (USDP) **submitted the proposal calling for the formation of the Ayeyawady River Commission (ARC). Regarding the said proposal, MP U Soe Myint of Magway Region Constituency No.6 (USDP)** stated that a total of 17 departments and divisions under the various government Ministries are carrying out work on the conservation of the Ayeyawady River with 19 laws and rules. Deputy Minister for Transport U Han Sein said, **"Ayeyawady River is the lifeblood, and its basin is crucial for socioeconomic development of the country. There should be water utilization policies and laws pertaining to basin development tasks. It needs a basin management commission like ARC for effective utilizations of water resource and basin conservation. I seconded that proposal. And the Ministry will make cooperation in respective role if the commission is set up."**¹⁵

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 15th day meeting on 6th February. During the session five questions were raised and answered, one bill approved and two proposals submitted. Key issues included the following:

- MP Paul Htan Htaing of Chin State Constituency No. 3 (CNP) asked whether there is any **plan to enact a law under which legal actions can be taken against inappropriate actions towards respective religions and also stated that the Ministry of Religious Affairs needed to ensure equal rights of different religions and be transparent in allocating funds so that there is no misunderstanding.** In responding, Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win said that according to **Sections 295, 296, 297 and Sub-section 295 (a) in Chapter 15 of Myanmar Penal Code state offences and punishment in religious affairs. In addition, respective religious organizations are taking care of offences pertaining to own religious affairs and the Religious Affairs Ministry handles the cases that cannot be settled by those organizations of different religions. And the ministry also opens religious affairs offices in region/state and districts and townships and arranges religious rituals of different religions.**¹⁶

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 16th day meeting on 7th February. During the session, three questions were raised and answered, one draft law approved, two proposals and one draft law submitted. Key issues included the following:

- Dr Aye Maung of Rakhine State Constituency No (1) (RNDP) put forward a proposal urging the Union government **to give special focus on border security, regional administration and immigration management with strategic long-term and short-term plans to ensure perpetuity**

¹⁴ Proposal on urging the Union government to cultivate democratic practices in Youth-centered BEHs approved – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 February 2013 (p. 16)

¹⁵ Proposal on setting up the Ayeyawady River Commission (ARC) approved – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/62newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 February 2013 (p. 16)

¹⁶ Religious Affairs Ministry ensuring equality of different religions: Dy Religious Affairs Minister – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/72newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 February 2013 (p. 16)

of the State's sovereignty reviewing the conflicts resulted from ethnic strife in Rakhine State in last June. The proposal was put to vote for debate and but was rejected for discussion. U Hla Swe of Magway Region Constituency No (12) (USDP) says, "It is rather early to discuss the proposal. It should be discussed only after the Rakhine's Conflict Investigation Commission releases its reports. If not, it might influence the commission's functions." U Phone Myint Aung of Yangon Region Constituency No. (3) (NDF) remarks, "It would take time to settle the issue even after the commission's report comes out."

- Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee Defence Services Personnel Hluttaw Representative Brig-Gen Kyaw Oo Lwin explained the committee's report on "**Population and Households Census Bill.**" Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population U Win Myint called on the session to approve the proposal and U Soe Win from Ayeyawady Region Constituency No. (2) (USDP) seconded the motion. **The bill was approved as amended.**¹⁷

UNOFFICIAL

SHAN ARMY LEADER HOLD FACT TO PANGLONG I

Speaking at a recent meeting in Loi Taileng base, opposite Maehongson's Pang Mapha district, Lt-Gen Yawdserk, President of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) also known as the political arm of the Shan State Army (SSA) 'South', said he was not interested in the planned "Panglong II", but only in the terms of the (1947) "Panglong I". "We will keep on adhering to the 1947 Panglong Agreement, in spite of the fact that we had suffered some losses (of sovereignty) because of it. Maybe Panglong II will even make us a poorer loser."

It is the belief of several Shan politicians that the Shan State, then known as Federated Shan States, could have become independent like the Federated Malay States, better known now as Malaysia, had it chosen to go alone in 1947.

The Panglong Agreement, or as renamed by some as "Panglong I", signed on 12 February 1947, had promised Chin, Kachin and Shan:

- Executive authority over frontier areas
- Full autonomy in internal administration
- Rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries
- Financial autonomy of each state

Brig Gen Pawng Kherh, Yawdserk's top peace negotiator, was also skeptical. "It'll be difficult to accept a Panglong II without first going back to Panglong I," he said.

Yawdserk and his lieutenants are not alone in being suspicious of Panglong II, although no one knows yet what shape it is going to take. Salai Kipp Kho Lian, a member of the Supreme Council of the Chin National Front (CNF), another group that is a signatory to the ceasefire agreement, has stated that the newly coined appellations like "21st century Panglong," "Panglong II" and "Panglong style" were misleading. "Some even talks about a conference surpassing Panglong," he said. "I don't believe in it. What I believe is that it is because Panglong is so good other states have also come along." He suggested "conference held in the spirit of Panglong" would be a for more suitable word than "Panglong style" and such.

Both the government and the opposition have declared that a union conference, with the aim to reach a Union Accord, will be held not later than 2014. A framework for political dialogue is being

¹⁷ MPs reckon further actions to be taken only after Rakhine's conflict investigation commission releases its report – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/82newsn.pdf> (NLM) 8 February 2013 (p. 16)

drafted by the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), set up by the ethnic armed movements in June 2012.¹⁸

JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OVERWHELMED BY VOLUME OF LETTERS OF COMPLAINT

The Lower House of Parliament's Judicial Committee Chairman Thura Aung Ko said that his office has been unable to keep up with the deluge of letters of complaint sent to it by members of the public. Speaking at a legal forum held at the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry office on February 2, he added that although his staff were unable to handle the volume of public complaints properly and effectively, they had reviewed and looked into about 1,000 complaints to date. He said his office had received about 3,000 letters of complaint, many of which they had forwarded to other parliamentary affairs committees for review. According to deliberations at the forum, most of these complaints would appear to involve bribery and corruption, as well as the allegations of graft at the Ministry of Telecommunications. Thura Aung Ko added that his office was working on letters of complaint in cooperation with the Rule of Law Committee headed by opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁹

NLD SET UP NEW OFFICE IN CHIN STATE

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has established a new office in Hakha, Chin State. The opening ceremony held on 1 February was attended by state, district and township NLD members of as well as 30 community and leaders and invited guests. The district and state executive committee of the party in Chin State is comprised of 15 members each while the township committee is made up of 19 people, according to the Hakha Post. NLD's branch offices in Chin State were reopened in major towns including Tedim, Tonzang, Falam, Hakha, Thantlang, Mindat, and Matupi in March last year after nine years in suppression by the military regimes. Formed in the aftermath of the 8888 uprising, NLD went through a series of repressive measures imposed by the military regime and was permitted to re-open office branches across Burma in 2001. Banned from any political activities in 2004, the party was declared illegal in 2010 and re-registered in November 2011.²⁰

ANALYSIS

The recent talks between the Government and the KIO are welcome developments. Had the fighting escalated, it could have derailed all the Government's reform initiatives. The question now is if troops on the ground on both sides can be restrained long enough to enable the second talks scheduled for later this month to take place. If the truce holds and if a separation of forces can be implemented, there is a real chance that a political solution and peace can be achieved for the first time since independence as hoped for by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.

But as can be seen by the stance of the RCSS and CNF, much still needs to be debated and discussed including what is meant by a "Panglong Conference", before substantive progress can be made.

On the Parliamentary front, many issues of importance are finally being addressed – disaster management, amending the penal code, air transport safety, power and rights of regional and state Ministers for National Races Affairs, regulating gold mining, morality and legalized gambling, protection from abuse of power, preservation of cultural heritage, protection of migrant workers

¹⁸ Shan army leader hold fast to Panglong I – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5235:shan-army-leader-hold-fast-to-panglong-i&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) 8 February 2013

¹⁹ Judicial Committee overwhelmed by volume of letters of complaint – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/8853-judicial-committee-overwhelmed-by-volume-of-letters-of-complaint.html> (Mizzima) 4 February 2013

²⁰ NLD set up new office centre in Hakha – <http://chinlandguardian.com/news-2009/2001-nld-set-up-new-office-center-in-hakha.html> (Chinland Guardian) 2 February 2013

overseas, equality of different religions and transparency in allocating funds, action against corrupt civil servants, etc.

The recent initiative to form a committee to review the status of political prisoners by the President's Office and the proposal by Parliament to form the Ayeyawaddy River Commission (ARC) are welcome initial steps in addressing two critical issues of importance in Burma. The two issues have become major challenges for the reformist government in Naypyidaw.

Political prisoners is an issue which precedes President Thein Sein's term in office and goes back way beyond successive governments. The initial reaction towards the creation of the committee has been received positively.

Both the Committee on political prisoners and the Commission on the Ayeyawaddy River will be judged not only on its efficiency but more importantly that their mandates are enforced in its entirety and in a transparent manner.

If such issues can continue to be openly debated and addressed, the Parliament can become a very important institution in promoting a sustainable democracy in Myanmar.