
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 15

UNION GOVERNMENT MEETS STATE AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO DISCUSS COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

The first Coordination meeting of 2011 of the Special Projects Implementation Committee was held at the Office of the President in Nay Pyi Taw on 23 April. The meeting was presided over by Committee Chairman President U Thein Sein and attended by the two Vice-Chairmen of the committee, Vice-Presidents Thiha Thura U Tin Aung Myint Oo and Dr Sai Mauk Kham, as well as committee members the Commander-in-Chief and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Union ministers, chief ministers of States and Regions, the auditor-general, deputy ministers, and departmental heads and officials.

In his address, President U Thein Sein said that under the new system, the Union Government as well as State and Region governments have been formed to carry out the task of national development and share in the task of nation-building. He added that Burma needs to strive for development in order not to fall behind other nations that are also trying to develop their nations. He noted that despite having natural resources both on land and in water, the country has in the past, for various reasons, lagged behind others in development. Therefore, it is necessary to implement nation-building tasks with added momentum in order to catch up with the neighbouring nations, by tapping into the human and natural resources of the nation in an effective manner. He said that the Tatmadaw government had improved existing roads and that measures to improve the agricultural sector for attaining food security are being carried out simultaneously – local self-sufficiency should be the first step to be followed by exports. Especially water is essential for the agricultural sector and the ongoing dam and river water pumping projects should be completed as quickly as possible. In addition, he said that to provide adequate irrigation water and clean drinking water in the regions where water is scarce, new dam, reservoir and river-water pumping projects must be launched as special projects. He urged State and Regional governments to effectively employ human, land and water resources so that the agriculture, meat and fish sectors can develop. Projects such as dams, river-water pumping, hydropower plants, strategic railway networks and strategic road networks needing a large amount investment and time should be included in the list of special projects and implemented under the supervision of the Union Government. In conclusion, the President stressed the need for cooperation and coordination between the Union Government and State/Region governments.¹

At the same meeting, several Chief Ministers also submitted reports. The Chief Minister of Kayin State Brig-Gen Zaw Min submitted a report on matters related to roads and hydro-power generation. The Chief Minister of Chin State U Hong Ngai reported on matters related to bridges and border trade. The Chief Minister of Sagaing Region U Tha Aye reported on matters related to roads, bridges, power supply, education, dams, river water pumping stations, and the repair of railroads. The Chief Minister of Bago Region U Nyan Win reported on matters related to conditions of bridges and roads. In reply, the President said that the projects presented at the meeting are vitally important for the development of the nation and that they needed to be categorized accordingly. In carrying out these tasks, he stressed the need for responsible officials at different levels to check worksites and monitor workers to ensure that there is neither waste nor malpractice

¹ Projects will achieve success only through cooperation and coordination between Union Government and State and Region governments – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-04-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 April 2011 (p. 1 + 7)

while at the same time ensuring worksite safety and welfare activities for workers to be carried out in line with the existing rules and regulations.²

SHAN STATE CHIEF MINISTER EMPHASIZES REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

In a meeting with district and township officials and departmental personnel in Kunlong Township on 26 April, the Chief Minister of Shan State, U Sao Aung Myat, urged state civil servants to join hands with local people in discharging their duties to achieve regional development. In a separate meeting held in Hopang, the Chief Minister also met members of the Leading Body of the Wa Self-Administered Division and stressed the need to focus on peace and security in the Division. The Chief Minister presented cash to patients at Hopang People's Hospital and viewed the site for the construction of a 50-bed hospital and a new basic education high school. On 27 April, the Chief Minister met district and township authorities and departmental personnel at the hall of the Leading Body of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone.³

Other political news not reported in the official media:

THEIN SEIN APPOINTS PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORS

According to local media, President U Thein Sein has appointed advisors to a presidential advisory board as authorized by the Constitution. The group of political advisors includes U Ko Ko Hlaing - a retired military officer from the War Office (Ministry of Defence), as well as Dr. Nay Zin Latt and U Ye Tint, both former military officers. The economic advisory group is to be headed by retired professor of economics of Rangoon University and former head of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Dr. U Myint, who is also a close friend of Aung San Suu Kyi. Also included in the economic team are U Set Aung and Dr Sein Hla Bo, while the legal advisory team includes retired Police Colonel Sit Aye, Daw Khin Myo Myint and U Than Kyaw from the Attorney-General's Office.⁴

POLITICIANS WARNED AGAINST 'UNLAWFUL' CONTACTS

Politicians in Burma are forbidden from communicating with groups deemed by the government to be 'unlawful', according to a Union Election Commission directive issued on 5 April. Parties risk being dissolved if they refuse to abide by the new rules. There is speculation that the warning may be intended to sever contact between newly elected MPs and exiled media and human rights groups. The move could also be aimed at cutting lines of communication between the registered political parties and the National League for Democracy (NLD), since the party's registration had been cancelled for its refusal to take part in the November elections. NLD spokesperson Nyan Win said however, that the NLD has never been declared "unlawful" by the government and there still remains a great deal of ambiguity over who qualifies as an 'Unlawful Association'. Nay Myo Wei of the Peace and Diversity Party said "there are a lot of points they didn't make clear as to which groups are unlawful, and it will be difficult [to be clear] if the government or the UEC doesn't specify which groups we should not be communicating with." The party is preparing a letter for the UEC in which it will also ascertain whether the NLD falls under this banner. Burmese law dictates that any

² Worksite safety, welfare activities needed for workers – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2011 (p. 16 + 9)

³ Emphasis to be placed on regional peace and security – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs11/NLM2011-04-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 April 2011 (p. 8)

⁴ Thein Sein Appoints Presidential Advisors - http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21193 (Irrawaddy) 27 April 2011 & Presidential 'advisors' raise eyebrows - <http://www.dvb.no/news/presidential-%E2%80%98advisors%E2%80%99-raise-eyebrows/15438> (DVB) 28 April 2011

“combination or body of persons” deemed by the president to be “[interfering] with the administration of the law or with the maintenance of law and order”, or indeed who is “a danger to the public peace”, will serve a minimum two-year jail term. Furthermore, according to the leader of the National Democratic Force (NDF), Khin Maung Swe, parties had already been told not to communicate with unlawful groups – but no list of those that fit the criteria has been released.⁵

SABOI JUM SEEKS PEACE FOR NEW BURMA GOVERNMENT AND KIO

A prominent Kachin pastor, Rev. Dr. Saboi Jum, is reportedly attempting to mediate a new peace agreement between the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the government. Rev. Saboi Jum, who is the founder and Chairman of the Shalom Foundation and former General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), reportedly met in February with two top KIO leaders - Vice-president Lt-Gen N’ban La Awng and Vice-chairman Lt-Gen Gauri Zau Seng - in Thailand, bringing a message from the Burmese generals, and then returned to Burma with a message from the KIO. In the past, the Reverend is said to have strongly advised the KIO to transform into a Border Guard Force (BGF). According to officials at KIO’s Laiza headquarters in Kachin State, Saboi Jum has said that “The BGF is the key. And, the door can be opened only with that key”.

A 16-year ceasefire agreement between the government (SPDC) and the KIO ended unilaterally when the former branded and labelled the KIO as “insurgents” following its rejection of the BGF last year. Since then, there has been no official dialogue between the two parties. However both sides have refrained from attacking each other.⁶

3 PARTIES CALL FOR A DRUG-FREE KACHIN STATE

Three political parties that contested the general election have urged the Kachin State government to make the elimination of drug abuse and drug production in the state a top priority. The National Unity Party (NUP), the Democracy Party Kachin State (DPKS) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) all urged the state government to create more job opportunities so people don’t turn to drugs. “The people in Kachin State especially youth are getting involved in the drug business, and we need to create job opportunities for them to put them on right track”, said Kachin State cabinet minister and NUP spokesman Han Shwe. Previously, the military regime did not take effective action to stem drug production and drug abuse in Kachin State, which resulted in increasing numbers of drug users and drug producers, said Bauk Jar, a NDF candidate in the Phakant constituency. She also added that the Chinese working at the Myitsone Dam project have brought with them narcotic drugs in all different size bags and that no one has arrested them. Local administrators were themselves involved in taking bribes and levied taxes on the traffickers who openly traded drugs, and the situation in the Kachin State is getting worse she said. Bauk Ja also added that people are skeptical of the new state government because it is led by members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Party officials from the three parties also said that building peace between the new government and armed groups in Kachin State is the most pressing issue, one that will affect all the other problems of the state.⁷

⁵ Politicians warned against “unlawful” contacts – <http://www.dvb.no/news/politicians-warned-against-%E2%80%98unlawful%E2%80%99-contacts/15340> (DVB) 20 April 2011

⁶ Saboi Jum seeks peace for new Burma government and KIO - <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/1889-saboi-jum-seeks-peace-for-new-burma-government-and-kio.html> (Kachin News Group) 18 April 2011

⁷ Three parties call for a drug-free Kachin State – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5158-three-parties-call-for-a-drug-free-kachin-state.html> (Mizzima) 19 April 2011

MPs BLOCKED FROM CYCLONE VICTIMS AND FACT-FINDING MISSIONS

Government authorities in Arakan State, western Burma, are reportedly blocking MPs from conducting fact-finding missions in the region, drawing the ire of parliamentarians who say their job is “pointless” if they cannot meet with their constituents. Pe Than from the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) says he had checked with officials prior to setting out on a recent trip to Myebon to meet with local villagers, only to be forced to return by the Myebon Township chairman who claimed there was “no permission from superior authorities”. He said it was “important” to meet with victims of the cyclone, which left around 86,000 homeless and 100,000 without adequate food and water. He said he would “continue with his plan to visit the villages” given it was not within the remit of the Myebon chairman to stop him. He added that fact-finding trips such as these were an important medium through which to relay information to Burma’s parliament. According to one of the many arbitrary laws contained in the present constitution, local authorities have the power to block such trips under the pretext of “preserving public tranquillity”. Similarly, another RNDP member, Maung Lone, was also reportedly prevented from holding a conference with locals from Kantaungyi Village, Rakhine State by the chairman of Myebon Township.⁸

PEACE MUST PRECEDE DEVELOPMENT: ETHNIC PARTY REPS

Five ethnic political parties have called for peaceful discussions between Burma’s new government and the country’s ethnic armed groups. The parties which attended the two-day meeting included the Rakhine Nationals Development Party (RNDP), All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP), Chin National Party (CNP), Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP) and the Shan Nationalities and Democratic Party (SNDP). Hla Soe, secretary and spokesman of the RNDP, said that peaceful discussions with ethnic armed groups is very important and necessary if the new government is serious in seeing development in these affected ethnic areas. Adding his voice to the call, RNDP Chairman Aye Maung said, “We appreciate that the new government will pursue development in the ethnic areas, but they must hold peaceful discussions with the different ethnic armed groups if they intend to do so. There will be a peaceful discussion if the armed group leaders are not arrested by the government. There will be no development in the ethnic areas without peaceful discussions.” A representative from the SNDP said that participants in the meeting also reviewed their experiences at the recently held parliamentary sessions.⁹

ANALYSIS

With parliamentary sessions concluded and new cabinets installed, the authorities in Burma may now be shifting its focus to monitoring the activities of opposition political parties. The recent directive issued on 5 April by the Union Election Commission (UEC) about “unlawful organizations” could be a precursor of new restrictions. But, to date, no action has been taken against anyone.

The new government, on its part, is trying to project a less authoritative image by holding special coordination meetings with State and Regional governments. But many are sceptical given that previous governments have failed to deliver. Only the results will tell.

A key test will be how the government and the military settle the matter of the armed ethnic groups. As stated by the ethnic parties, there can be no development without peace and there can be no peace without dialogue.

⁸ MPs blocked from cyclone victims – <http://www.dvb.no/news/mps-blocked-from-cyclone-victims/15369> (DVB) 22 April 2011

⁹ Peace Must Precede Development: Ethnic Party Reps – http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=21196 (Irrawaddy) 27 April 2011