

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.23

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ADDRESSES MYANMAR PROJECT COMMISSION MEETING

President Thein Sein delivered a speech at the Planning Commission Meeting held in the capital Nay Pyi Taw on June 25. In his address, the President said that during the previous two years, there had been both successes and slowdowns in political economic and social reform processes of the government as the country did not have enough democratic experiences and called for more efforts with added momentum to implement the reforms. He also stated that the government had overcome challenges thanks to public support and public understanding, and while sectarian and religious conflicts continued the government had decided to move forward with goodwill. The President called on the people, to do their part to give a helping hand in the task of ensuring peace and stability and the rule of law as economic development rests on peace and stability. Regarding the peace process, Thein Sein added that some issues still remain to be politically discussed although the government had reached an agreement with ethnic armed groups to end clashes and that the matter would soon be submitted to the Parliament leading to a peace dialogue.¹

BURMESE LEADERS RECEIVE CHINESE STATE COUNCILLOR YANG JIECHI

President Thein Sein received the visiting Chinese State Councillor, Yang Jiechi in Nay Pyi Taw on 24 June and discussed a number of political and economic issues, including border region development, Kyaukphyu Industrial Zone Project and Chinese assistance during the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games. They also held comprehensive discussions on matters related to development of the sectors of health, ensuring peace and stability in border regions of the two countries and cementing bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership. Mr Jiechi and party called on Vice-President Nyan Tun, Speaker of the Lower House Thura Shwe Mann and exchanged views on further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries. The two sides also signed the Action Plan of China-Myanmar Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Partnership during the visit.²

MYANMAR, US INK ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AGREEMENT

The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement between Myanmar and the US was signed by Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung and US Ambassador to Myanmar Mr. Derek J. Mitchell on 28 June in Yangon. Deputy Minister Set Aung said that the agreement was a new chapter between the two countries after 1988 and under the agreement the US Government will provide economic, technological and humanitarian aid to Myanmar. The agreement will develop not only economic and technical cooperation between the two countries but also trade, investment and relations between the two peoples, he added. US Ambassador Mr. Derek J. Mitchell said since taking office by Thein Sein's new government, democracy reform processes have been obvious; adding that he believes all-inclusive sustainable development will be gained from those reforms. The signing of agreement between the two countries will assist in materializing

¹ President U Thein Sein addresses Republic of the Union of Myanmar Project Commission meeting –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2013 (p. 1 & 9)

² Thanks to Industrial Zone Project, Kyaukpyu region could see development –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-25-red.pdf> (NLM) 25 June 2013 (p. 1)/
Mutual understanding and sympathy served as sound foundations of bilateral relations: Vice-President U Nyan Tun –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-24-red.pdf> (NLM) 24 June 2013 (p. 1)/
Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Chinese State Councillor –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-24-red.pdf> (NLM) 24 June 2013 (p. 16)

those reforms, he said. The agreement provides economic, technological and humanitarian assistance being implemented by Myanmar Government.³

SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO RUSSIA

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing left for the Russian Federation at the invitation of Russian Minister of Defence General of the Army Sergey K. Shoigu. The Burmese delegation called on Schoigu on 25 June. During the meeting, Schoigu said he believed that the visit by the Army Chief would enhance ties between the two countries and that exchanges on military delegations will become more frequent in the future. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that his visit is the new step for promoting relations and friendships between the two armed forces and also expressed his hoped that Russia would share its experiences to Myanmar to overcome the challenges for democratic transition in the country. During the visit, the delegation visited cultural and industrial works in Moscow and St Petersburg and met Myanmar military trainees currently studying in Russia.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

- The 7th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 1st day meeting on 25th June. In his opening speech, the Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker called for success of exercising of legislative power and checks and balance system, ending the decade-long armed conflicts, rule of law, peace and stability, national reconsolidation and national unity are all interrelated with each other, new laws prescribed by Hluttaws should you be consistent with the current times and that such laws be enacted to promote the interests of the people and the State. During the session 24 new Defence Services Personnel MPs were sworn in, 1 appointment approved and 2 questions were raised and answered.
- **Appointment of retired Director-General U Myint Swe of Settlement and Land Records Department as a member of Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission was approved** during the session;
- U Thein Tun Oo of Amarapura Constituency asked if there is any plan to **draft a new law that can take actions against racial and religious conflicts by the Union Government and respective ministries in accord with the Section 364 of the Constitution**. In responding, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Chief of Myanmar Police Force Police Brig-Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun replied that **Myanmar has already prescribed the 2012-Peaceful Gathering and Peaceful Procession Law and Bylaws in addition to Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law, Riots Control Handbook and Police Acts. The existing laws are sufficient according the Constitution; Section 364 of the constitution describes that “The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden. Moreover, any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this Constitution. A law may be promulgated to punish such activity.”** However, it is not yet necessary to promulgate a law because a new law can cause complications to the criminal law, the penal code and other existing laws. Besides, complications can arise regarding the essence and concepts of the law among the personnel or bodies who practise laws and the people, he said. U Thein Tun Oo replied that his question was aimed at protecting life and property of the people when unrest occurred as stated in Section 364 of the constitution;

³ Myanmar, US ink Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-28-red.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2013 (p. 1)

⁴ Senior General Min Aung Hlaing leaves for Russian Federation –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-24-red.pdf> (NLM) 24 June 2013 (p. 16)/
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Russian Defence Minister General of the Army Sergey K Schoigu hold talks –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2013 (p.1)

- U Sai Thiha Kyaw of Mongya Constituency asked **how the rural area development tasks of the companies funded by the government are supervised.** Deputy Minister for Border Affairs Maj-Gen Zaw Win replied that the **government invited tender for creating job opportunities for local people, and development tasks were carried out as from 2012-2013 FY after laying down strict rules for the companies and signed the contracts with them.** A combined team comprising officials from respective state/region/ township Development Affairs Departments was organized to inspect the works and to control the quality of the works, he said. Those companies who failed to complete the work in time or who harm the people are obliged to renew their assignments or to replace the materials in accordance with the instructions of the supervisory team, he said. If they failed to complete their works, their deposits were confiscated or they are fined, he said. If damages occurred to the works within five year, they are obliged to repair the damages.⁵

The 7th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 2nd day meeting on 26th June. During the session 2 urgent proposals, 2 questions and 1 bill and 1 report was submitted during the session. Key issues included the following:

- U Thein Lwin of Chauk Constituency submitted an **urgent proposal praising the Union government, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives, respective departments and organizations and persons by Pyithu Hluttaw for successful holding of World Economic Forum on East Asia-2013 in Myanmar;**
- U Myo Swe of Tanai Constituency submitted an **urgent proposal urging the Union government to choose telecommunication operators only after Telecommunications Law has been promulgated;**
- **Regarding the questions on if there is no plan to hold free and fair by-elections in vacant constituencies and to designate a specific time period for by-elections,** Chairman of the Union Election Commission U Tin Aye replied that the Commission has planned to hold by-elections occasionally at appropriate vacant constituencies but at present is carrying out preparation works for holding the free and fair 2015-Elections. At present there is no any plan to hold free and fair by-elections for the constituencies with few vacant seats however By-elections will be held at a designated period when Pyidaungsu Hluttaw prescribed laws for specific time period for by-elections. The number of vacant seats after the first by-elections is 15— 6 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives, 4 Amyotha Hluttaw representatives and 5 Region/State representatives;
- Deputy Minister for Health Dr Win Myint submitted the bill amending **the Eye Donation Law** and Bill Committee member Dr Soe Moe Aung read out **the committee's report.**⁶

The 7th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 3rd day meeting on 27th June. During the session 1 urgent proposal, 2 bills and 1 report were submitted and discussed during the session.

- Union Minister for Communications and Information Technology U Myat Hein explained the **urgent proposal on urging the Union government to delay the award of telecom licenses only after the telecommunications law had been enacted.** The Minister said that **Myanmar's mobile telephone density is 7.8 per cent and extremely low if compared with other regional countries**

⁵ Seventh regular session of First Pyithu Hluttaw kicks off. It needs to promulgate fair laws which people should and can follow: Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

⁶ No plan to hold by-elections for constituencies with few vacant seats – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-27-red.pdf> (NLM) 27 June 2013 (p.16)

and a total of 91 local and foreign applications were received. Twelve of prequalification contenders were chosen as second step on 11 April. Eleven of 12 last contenders have submitted the tenders on 3 June. Two telecom operators who win licenses will be announced on 27 June. There will be four telecom operators including new telecom operators. Delaying the award of telecom licenses could lose the trust of foreign investors in the country thereby tarnishing county's image. It is impossible to break promises in consideration of country's images and dignity and people's interest. Daw Tin Nwe Oo of Dagon Myothit (North Constituency) said that selection process of telecom operators had been transparent and that submission of the urgent motion being tabled could be seen as being dishonest and potentially tarnish the country's image and investment opportunities. And thus granting of telecom licenses should be done as promised for national interest and country's long-term interest. U Thein Swe of An Constituency said the Ministry's undertakings and stated that the selection process of telecom operators should proceed as promised;

- Deputy Minister for Transport U Han Sein submitted the Bill amending the Myanmar Aircraft Act and Multi Transport Bill;
- Chairman of Pyithu Hluttaw Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee U Win Sein submitted the committee's reports.⁷

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 7th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 1st day meeting on 25th June. During the session 9 new Defence Services Personnel representatives were sworn in, 3 questions raised and answered, and the following issues were raised and answered:

- Deputy Ministers answered three questions on health, electric power and transport sectors;
- Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation U Han Sein proposed bills to amend regarding water transport and Myanmar Maritime University;
- U Khin Maung Yi of Ayeyawady Region Constituency No (6) submitted a proposal to take necessary measures and punitive actions against the violation of already promulgated "Control of Smoking and Consumption of Tobacco Product Law". The session approved to discuss the tabled proposal;
- U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency No (6) a proposal to scrutinize agricultural figures over irrigable land areas again and to seek the approval of the Union Government.⁸

The 7th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 2nd day meeting on 26th June. During the session 1 question 2 bills and 1 proposal submitted and discussed.

- Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation U Han Sein proposed bills to amend regarding water transport and Myanmar Maritime University;
- The Hluttaw decided to approve the formation of friendship associations with parliaments of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Japan, Australia and France;
- Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Phone Swe submitted a proposal on Early Child Care and Development Bill;
- Dr Htay Win of Ayeyawady Region Constituency No.5. submitted a proposal urging the Union government to offer free medical services as part of poverty alleviation tasks. The proposal

⁷ Suspending of telecom licenses could lose trust of foreign investors, tarnish county's image – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-28-red.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2013 (p. 9)

⁸ Seventh regular session of First Amyotha Hluttaw starts – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-26.pdf> (NLM) 26 June 2013 (p. 16)

was discussed by 11 MPs. Deputy Minister for Health Dr Daw Thein Thein Htay **discussed the proposal and the session decided to put the proposal on record.**⁹

The 7th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 3rd day meeting on 27th June. During the session 5 questions were replied, 1 bill and 3 reports submitted, 1 proposal discussed and approved and 3 new proposals submitted.

- U Myint Tun of Bago Region Constituency No.10 raised a question and asked if a plan to expose and take action against those of Yangon and Bago Regions who do not abide by the Farmland Law, transforming farmlands to land plots for other purposes and constructing buildings on the plots. Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Ohn Than answered the question;
- 4 Hluttaw representatives discussed **the proposal urging the Union government to management of region or state governments on religious affairs in line with the authority prescribed in the constitution.** Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs U Soe Win explained that there is no need to submit the applications on renovation, maintenance and construction of religious buildings of respective religions to the Ministry of Religious Affairs but to take permission from the respective region/state governments and Nay Pyi Taw Council. Moreover, the religious ceremonies are not to seek permission from the respective region/state governments. The Hluttaw approved the proposal;
- Dr Khin Shwe of Yangon Region Constituency No.9 submitted a proposal to extend consulates-general and honorary consuls for promotion of international trade. The session decided to discuss the proposal.¹⁰

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

RULING PARTY MUST STOP THOSE SEEKING U-TURN ON MYANMAR REFORMS - LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER

Parliamentary Speaker, Thura Shwe Mann has urged fellow party members of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to oppose those seeking to reverse Myanmar's reforms. The Speakers comments came in response to questions posed by the Union Daily Paper, a USDP mouthpiece. "The ruling USDP is responsible to stop those seeking a U-turn in Myanmar's political reforms. The multiparty democratic system and market economy prescribed in the Constitution came into sight with the approval of the ruling party and that is supported by the people," said Shwe Mann. Similarly, on his recent visit to the US, the Lower House Speaker also mentioned plans to merge the ruling party and the opposition National League for Democracy party and that such initiatives were crucial in achieving national reconciliation.¹¹

USDP PARTY UNDECIDED ON PR SYSTEM, CHARTER CHANGE

A leading member of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) said that the USDP had not yet decided whether to adopt a proportional representation (PR) system or to amend the Constitution ahead of the 2015 elections. Speaking to a press conference following a three-day meeting of the party's central executive committee in Nay Pyi Taw, USDP vice chairman Htay Oo said: "We haven't made any decisions about whether we will accept the PR system or not and which sections of the Constitution we will amend. "Regarding this issue, we have given the task to the

⁹ Proposal on free medical services discussed –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-27-red.pdf> (NLM) 27 June 2013 (p.16)

¹⁰ Private entrepreneurs allowed to export finished jade and gem products –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-06-28-red.pdf> (NLM) 28 June 2013 (p. 9)

¹¹ Ruling Party Must Stop Those Seeking U-Turn On Myanmar Reforms - Lower House Speaker –

<http://elevenmyanmar.com/politics/2577-ruling-party-must-stop-those-seeking-u-turn-on-myanmar-reforms-lower-house-speaker> (Eleven News Media) 24 June 2013

central committee. We will amend this for the benefit of the public if necessary." A public referendum would be required if certain parts of the Constitution are chosen for amendment, he added. In responding to the notion of the USDP and NLD to form a coalition after the 2015 election, Htay Oo told journalists that it was still too early to talk about a future government. He reaffirmed that the party would not backtrack on the country's reform process and would also guard against the actions of those aiming to derail reform.¹²

RENEWED CLASHES BETWEEN MYANMAR ARMY AND SSA

Renewed clashes have broken out between the Myanmar army and the Shan State Army (SSA), according to a spokesperson of Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). Around 100 people took shelter in a Buddhist monastery after the clashes occurred in some areas of Kyaythee Township, northern Shan state on June 20 and 21. This is the most recent of a series of clashes this year between the Myanmar army and the Shan ethnic armed group, displacing civilians and threatening to derail a ceasefire agreement. Locals also said there were more clashes on June 23 in Shiwanwit village-tract of the township and reports of heavy weapons firing by the Myanmar army. Some homes were damaged but there have been no causalities reported so far. SNLD Spokesman Sai Lait said the refugees sent a letter to SSPP/SSA regarding the deaths of two people killed by government troops and that the SNLD will try to resolve the issue with the government's peace committee.¹³

GOVERNMENT TROOPS AND KIA IN CLASH IN SHAN STATE

Units from the Burma Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) clashed again on 27 June (Thursday), as fighting in the Pangsai (Kyukok) area of northern Shan state carried over for the second straight day.

The fighting broke out near Seng Htu Hkyet (Jang Hpang Kawng) said Zau Seng, a commander from the Pangsai-based 5th Section unit of the Mungshawa Hpyen Hpung (MHH or People's Army in Kachin), a militia affiliated with the KIA's civilian wing the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The MHH are a civilian force made up of local Kachin volunteers who frequently fight alongside regular KIA forces.

The latest clashes involved troops from the Burma Army's Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 507 and a combined group of troops from KIA Battalion 36 and their allies with the 5th Section of the MHH battalion, according to Zau Seng. "The fighting began after a column of Burmese troops intruded into Seng Htu Hkyet where we have been planning to set up our base," said Zau Seng. It is not yet known whether there were any casualties from either side.

About a quarter of the KIO's territory is located in Kachin inhabited areas of northern Shan state, a fact often neglected in much of the news coverage of conflict. A long section of territory controlled by the KIO in Shan state lies along the route of the Shwe pipeline project's twin oil and natural gas pipelines which are supposed to be finished very soon. Although the pipeline project may not be the primary reason behind the army's offensive against the KIO, many observers believe that it has certainly fuelled the conflict.¹⁴

¹² Ruling party undecided on PR system, Charter change –
<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/2585-ruling-party-undecided-on-pr-system-charter-change> (Eleven News Media) 25 June 2013

¹³ Burma Army engaged in friendly-fire –
http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5477:burma-army-engaged-in-friendly-fire&catid=86:war&Itemid=284 (S.H.A.N) 25 June 2013

¹⁴ Burma Army and KIA battle for second straight day in Shan State –
<http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2530-burma-army-and-kia-battle-for-second-straight-day-in-shan-state.html> (KNG) 27 June 2013

DAILOGUE FOR CHIN COMMUNITY IN CHIN STATE

A community development dialogue programme was conducted by the Network for Chin Community Development (NCCD) in Teddim Township, between 21 and 22 June 2013 in Nginte village and attended by locals from other 8 villages. The right to own land and its management, the on-going national reconciliation peace process were discussed in the dialogue programme, said Salai Sitmon, from the NCCD. He also added that the discussions were focused on the strong and weak points of the development program being carried out between the local people and the NCCD.

The Network for Chin Community Development (NCCD) was founded in 1995 to empower the disenfranchised and exploited people of Chin State. The organization works in conjunction with other Chin civil society organizations to promote and improve the lives of local people through development. Similar programmes are also being scheduled for villages and townships in southern and central Chin State.¹⁵

ANALYSIS

President Thein Sein highlighted that political, economic and social stability are key requisites in the successful implementation of the current democratic reforms in the country. In his address to the Planning Commission, he has emphasized the importance in ending decades of fighting with ethnic armed groups and that his government is keen to implement a nation-wide ceasefire agreement in the near future. The President has repeatedly affirmed his commitment in achieving national reconciliation; though the on-going clashes between the Burmese Army and ethnic armed groups in both the Kachin and Shan States have cast suspicion on the government's commitment to the peace process. The clashes raise questions not only on the successful holding of a nation-wide ceasefire agreement but more importantly if the President can control the military (Tatmadaw).

¹⁵ Dialogue for Chin community in Chin State –
<http://www.khonumthung.org/?p=1506%23more-1506> (Khonumthung) 28 June 2013