

## POLITICAL MONITOR NO.31

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS 88 GENERATION PEACE AND OPEN SOCIETY GROUP**

President Thein Sein held talks with the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society Group led by Min Ko Naing on 14 September. They held cordial discussions covered a wide range of issues including reconciliation, mapping of a new form of political culture, flourishing of democratic practices and promoting socio-economic status of the people and to work together in dealing with transitional challenges. Others issues included resolving land disputes, political prisoners and all inclusiveness of national races groups, political parties and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the on-going peace process.<sup>1</sup>

#### **CSOs, MEDIA PLAY CRUCIAL ROLE FOR FREE, FAIR ELECTIONS**

A media conference (2013) between the Union Election Commission and political parties, jointly organized by Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Programme and International Media Support (IMS), was held in Yangon on 14 September. In his speech, the Union Election Commission (UEC) Chairman Tin Aye said that a strategic plan is being drawn in cooperation to the holding of free and fair elections in 2015. Laws and bylaws which are being drafted and cooperation of all political parties is of prime importance for successful holding the elections. Tin Aye highlighted the crucial role of CSOs and media in ensuring a free and fair election and also called for the collaboration of all political parties, CSOs and media in the holding of elections.<sup>2</sup>

#### **LAWMAKERS MEET TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF ETHNIC NATIONALITIES**

Hluttaw Speakers and officials met with Myanmar Parliamentarian Committee and Union Attorney-General and region/state advocates-general on 13 September to discuss the bill on protection of the rights of ethnic nationalities to cooperate in equalizing the different laws of Regions and States in legislative matters of the Union. Speaking at the meeting Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann called for sharing of power between the three branches in the democratization process and that new legislation could now be enacted at both Union and regional/state levels accordingly. He also urged MPs to keep abreast with realities and concerns of people from different social strata, civil servants, administrative organs in their own constituencies when carrying out their duties. Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Khin Aung Myint called on advocates-general to take active part in the legislative matters of regions and states and called for the equality of all citizens under the law as the very essence of the rule of law, pointing out the different penalties of different courts against the same offences.<sup>3</sup>

#### **PRESIDENT RECEIVES LATVIAN FOREIGN MINISTER**

President Thein Sein received the Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics in Naypyitaw on 13 September. They discussed promotion of ties between the two countries and cooperation in education, health, human resources development and tourism industries. The two leaders also exchanged views on promotion of cooperation in information technology, environmental

<sup>1</sup> President U Thein Sein meets 88 Generation Peace and Open Society Group –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-15-red.pdf> (NLM) 15 September 2013 (p.1)

<sup>2</sup> CSOs, media play crucial role for free, fair elections –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-15-red.pdf> (NLM) 15 September 2013 (p.16)

<sup>3</sup> Lawmakers meet to protect rights of ethnic nationalities –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-14-red.pdf> (NLM) 14 September 2013 (p.9)

conservation, culture, economic, trade, international relations and prospects for signing of MoU on sector-wise cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

### **SPEAKER THURA SHWE MANN ATTENDS 34TH AIPA MEETING**

Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann attended the 34th ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) held in Brunei Darussalam on 17 September. In his address, Thura Shwe Mann explained the active role of Myanmar MPs in national reconsolidation and peace-making process. Myanmar is actively participating in activities of AIPA and cooperation between the parliaments and stated that Myanmar would continue supporting AIPA's activities.<sup>5</sup>

### **MYANMAR-THAI HOLD HIGH LEVEL MILITARY MEETING**

The first Thailand-Myanmar High Level Committee Meeting was held in Bangkok from 16 to 17 September and attended by the Myanmar Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces General Tanasak Patimapragorn. During the meeting, the two sides held talks on demarcation of sea and land boundaries, cooperation between the two armed forces as well as security along the Thai-Myanmar border. The Myanmar delegation also called on Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and discussed a wide range of issues including the demarcation of undefined Myanmar-Thai border, problem of illegal migrants and cooperation in the successful implementation of the Dawei Economic Zone.<sup>6</sup>

## **UNOFFICIAL MEDIA**

### **KIO, GOVT TEAMS LAY GROUNDWORK FOR FURTHER TALKS**

Liaison teams representing the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the government's Peace-making Work Committee concluded a two-day meeting in Myitkyina on 17 September with one mediator saying hopes are high that negotiations will recommence at a union-level in October. Hla Maung Shwe of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) said issues related to a nationwide ceasefire; the formation of a committee to monitor the ceasefire process; the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs); and fixing arrangements for next month's meeting were discussed at the meeting. "It is likely there will be union-level talks involving senior leaders from both sides by the end of the first week of October," he said, adding that the liaison teams are also likely to hold a follow-up meeting at the end of this month.

KIO General-Secretary Dr La Ja said that at the previous round of talks, the government delegation had agreed to take steps to ensure that government forces withdraw from positions close to the Kachin front lines and bases, but that such moves had not yet happened. "There have not been as many clashes as before, and almost none in the areas around the KIO headquarters," he said. "However, we have been informed about fighting along the Machanbaw-Putao route and just yesterday in an area east of Mansi town in Bhamo and also in the KIA Brigade 4 territory. So

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<sup>4</sup> President receives Latvian Foreign Minister –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-14-red.pdf> (NLM) 14 September 2013 (p.

<sup>5</sup> Speaker of Pyidaungsu, Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann attends 34th AIPA –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 September 2013

<sup>6</sup> Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to attend 1st Thailand-Myanmar High Level Committee Meeting –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-16-red.pdf> (NLM) 16 September 2013 (p.16)/  
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrives at Wing-6 of Royal Thai Air Force in Bangkok –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 September 2013 (p.1)/  
Agreements of First Thailand-Myanmar High Level Committee Meeting signed –  
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-09-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 September 2013 (p. 9)

although there aren't as many clashes as before, they still continue to break out. "It's not very good for the peace process if hostilities continue," he said.<sup>7</sup>

### **KAREN PARTIES AIM TO MERGE BY 2015**

Four ethnic Karen-based political parties have concluded a two-day meeting aimed at merging the four parties into one. Although no definitive agreement was reached, talks will continue with the aim of merging ahead of the next general election in 2015, according to the deputy-chairman of the Kayin People's Party. Representatives of the Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP), the Kayin People's Party (KPP), the Kayin State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP), and the Kayin Democratic Party (KDP) —all of which contested the 2010 general election—met in Hpa-an on 14 to 15 September. Saw Say Wah, Deputy-Chairman of the Kayin People's Party, said that the party delegates spoke about facilitating future elections throughout Karen state and establishing rights and conditions for all Karen people over 18 to vote. "Our priority is to merge the parties but it won't be possible in the immediate term," he said. "We used the meeting as an opportunity to discuss other topics of interest to the Karen people." At the 2010 elections, polls were cancelled—primarily due to security fears—at more than 150 villages in Karen state: at Myawaddy, Kawkareik, Kya Inn Seik Gyi, Hpa-an, Hlaingbwe, Hpapun and Thandaung townships.<sup>8</sup>

### **SHAN REPS DISCUSS MYANMAR'S CONSTITUTION**

Parliamentarians from the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) held a meeting in Taunggyi from 9 to 11 September to discuss potential changes to the constitution – including one that would strip the military of its "leadership" role in politics. The meeting was attended by many of the party's Amyotha Hluttaw, Pyithu Hluttaw and regional Hluttaw representatives. The meeting comes after the parliament formed a 109-member committee, including five members of the SNDP, to review the constitution. The committee has until December 31 to submit a report recommending changes. "There was no exact result about the changes we want to make to the constitution. We just discussed some ideas," said Sai San Min an MP from the Amyotha Hluttaw. Ye Tun, party member and Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Hsipaw, said that SNDP will mainly focus on section 6(f), which affirms the Tatmadaw's (Myanmar military) role in "the national political leadership role of the state". "However, we don't expect that we will be successful," he said. He also added by saying that discussions had been separated into two sections: sections of the constitution that are not in accord with democracy and changes that would bring practical benefit to citizens' democratic rights. The sharing of power, resources and revenue between the central and state governments was discussed, and delegates agreed that state and region chief ministers should be elected by state and region Hluttaw representatives rather than appointed by the president as under the current system.<sup>9</sup>

### **RENEWED CALL AGAINST ALP'S LIAISON OFFICE OPENING IN CHIN STATE**

Communities in Paletwa Township, Chin State have re-voiced their concerns over the ALP's (Arakan Liberation Party) demand to establish a liaison office in their township. Khumi Chin leaders renewed their call after ALP had reportedly mentioned the issue on the agenda during their recent meeting with the government's Peace-making Work Committee in Chiang Mai, Thailand. "Our people do not agree. ALP must set up its liaison offices only in Arakan State," said Pu Khuai Yan, Amyotha Hluttaw

<sup>7</sup> KIO, govt teams lay groundwork for further talks – <http://www.dvb.no/news/kio-govt-teams-lay-groundwork-for-further-talks-burma-myanmar-kachin/32598> (DVB) 18 September 2013

<sup>8</sup> Karen parties aim to merge by 2015 – <http://www.dvb.no/news/karen-parties-aim-to-merge-by-2015-burma-myanmar-ethnic-issues/32571> (DVB) 17 September 2013

<sup>9</sup> Shan reps discuss Myanmar's constitution – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/8184-shan-party-reps-meet-to-discuss-changes-to-constitution.html> (Myanmar Times) 15 September 2013

representative of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) from Paletwa. Community leader Aih Maung Nyo said that ALP should stay inside their own place, and work toward protecting and developing their own state. One of the provisions in the ceasefire agreement reached on 5 April 2012 between ALP and Rakhine State government is to open liaison offices in Paletwa of Chin State, and Kyauktaw of Rakhine State. In September 2013, the meeting between ALP and Burma's Peace-making Work Committee in Chiang Mai, Thailand ended without reaching any agreements.<sup>10</sup>

## ANALYSIS

President Thein Sein's meeting with the 88 Generation Students Group is yet another step in achieving national reconciliation and serve as a basis for the inclusion of civil society groups in the current democratic reform process. The Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) meeting held in Taunggyi to discuss potential changes to the Constitution reflects the growing concerns of the issue and if not handled in the right manner could jeopardize the country's fragile political future. While discussions on amending the Constitution are crucial and key in the current political process, prolonged debates and unraveling of it should be avoided at all costs. Failing to do so, could affect not only the peace process but also preparations for the 2015 elections. Transition to democracy has not been easy and cannot be achieved easily and will need understanding and more importantly readiness by all stakeholders to make compromises. In this regard, the government should take the lead in implementing measures working hand in hand with all political parties, ethnic groups to ensure a successful outcome of the on-going democratic reforms in Myanmar.

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<sup>10</sup> Renewed call against ALP's liaison office in Chin State – <http://chinlandguardian.com/index.php/national-news/item/1914-renewed-call-against-alp-s-liaison-office-in-chin-state> (Chinland Guardian) 16 September 2013