

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.14

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT MEETS KNU DELEGATION

President Thein Sein received the Chairman of the Karen National Union (KNU) Saw Mutu Sae Poe and delegation in Naypyitaw on 3 June. The two sides discussed issues related to the on-going national reconciliation process and the signing of a nationwide ceasefire agreement. The Karen delegation, also met with Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services Snr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing. The Commander-in-Chief pledged that the armed forces will strive to ensure the development of the nation while fully taking part in efforts to achieve peace and stability and unity. The KNU leader Mutu Sae Poe reiterated the commitment of his organization for peace.¹

RETIRED BRITISH GENERAL MEETS MYANMAR LEADERS

Britain's former Chief of the Defence Staff (Rtd) General Sir David Richards and party called on Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 3 June in Nay Pyi Taw and exchanged views on strengthening friendly relations between two armed forces. They also discussed the role of the military in the country's on-going democratization process. General Richards and party also held talks the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the Lower House Thura Shwe Mann and discussed the promotion of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The delegation also held discussions with the Police Chief Maj-Gen Zaw Win on implementation of the British assistance programme to reform the Myanmar Police Force. They exchanged views on the reform process in the security sector, the role of the police force, a public-centred policing process and the improvement of the police force to meet international standards.²

MYANMAR TO CEMENT MILITARY TIES WITH JAPAN

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces delegation led by Chief of Staff General Shigeru Iwasaki arrived in Myanmar and called on President Thein Sein on 28 May. The two leaders discussed strengthening military cooperation between Myanmar and Japan and issues related to technologies, grants and loans to be provided by the Japanese government to Myanmar. The Japanese delegation also met Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and discussed bilateral military ties and mutual cooperation in security and disaster relief. The visit is the first by Japan's army chief to Myanmar since the Second World War.³

GOV'T WELCOMES YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

In addressing a youth seminar on 29 May, Union Minister of the President's Office Soe Thane said that the government welcomes the participation of youths in the political sector to create a modern developed country. Minister Soe Thane urged the youths to actively participate in building a peaceful and stable nation, with democracy at its core. Compare with developed nations like

¹ President, KNU delegation discuss development in nationwide ceasefire agreement – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 June 2014 (p. 1 &3)/
Concerted efforts needed for three fundamental concepts of democratization, senior general says – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 June 2014 (p. 3)

² Myanmar, Britain to reform role of Myanmar Armed Forces in democratization process – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 June 2014 (p. 3)/
Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw meets Chief of the Defence Staff (Rtd) of Britain – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-03.pdf> (NLM) 3 June 2014 (p. 3)/
Views exchanged on role of police force – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 June 2014 (p. 2)

³ Myanmar to cement military ties with Japan – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-05-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 May 2014 (p. 3)

Denmark and Singapore, Myanmar still has weak points regarding the encouragement of youths to participate in politics, the Union minister said. During the seminar organized by the Innovation and Action Aid in Yangon, two officials from the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy-DIPD discussed their political experiences. General-Secretary of the 88 General, Peace and Open Society Group Ko Ko Gyi, urged the new generation “to work hard to become professionals in their fields with new ideas and liberal views” so that they can build a new democratic nation and called on the older generations to create opportunities for the new generations and to let them learn from their mistakes, he added. The seminar was attended by members of 58 political parties and organizations.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 1st day meeting on 28 May. At the session discussions on **the Standardization Bill sent back by the Upper House with a 23-point amendment took place and a decision taken to submit the bill to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw was adopted.**⁵

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 2nd day meeting on 29 May. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **In answering a question of a Lower House representative who criticized excessive logging despite an announcement by the government that export of logs would be banned this year, Deputy Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry said that timber extraction was conducted with minimal impact on prime forests, meeting demands of domestic wood-based industries.**⁶

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 3rd day meeting on 30 May. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **Reports on foreign businesses in disguise of local ones and a proposal for presidential amnesty topping the agenda;**
- **In responding questions on whether there is constant supervision to prevent foreign businesses from carrying out their operations in disguise of local businessmen, Union Minister Win Shein said on behalf of the MIC that foreign businesses used to do so because they could not rent land from private businessmen under the 1988 Foreign Investment Law or benefit from the lower taxes levied on local businesses. Now the government has amended the law and allowed foreign businesses to lease land from private businessmen. Such foreign businesses were allowed to re-register as foreign firms;**
- **Concerning the proposal for presidential amnesty, Deputy Minister Brig-Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun said the general amnesty would be announced when appropriate.**⁷

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 4th day meeting on 3 June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **Regarding a question on bank loans, the vice chairman of the Central Bank of Myanmar explained that bank loans are handed out, particularly to industries involved in food**

⁴ Gov't welcomes youth participation in politics –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-05-30.pdf> (NLM) 30 May 2014 (p. 2)

⁵ Myanmar Parliament reconvenes with talks on anti-terrorism bill, writ petition bill –

<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/29/05/2014/id-9500> (NLM) 29 May 2014 (p. 2)

⁶ Deforestation, vehicle and competition tax among top issues in Myanmar Parliament discussions –

<http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/30/05/2014/id-9510> (NLM) 30 May 2014 (p. 3)

⁷ Foreign businesses, general amnesty discussed in Hluttaw –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-05-31.pdf> (NLM) 31 May 2014 (p. 3)

production, agriculture, livestock breeding, fisheries, construction, transport, and logistics services;

- **The Deputy Minister for Construction also briefed the session on issues related to the construction of roads, conduits and water-retaining walls in Tamu and Okpo towns and explained that projects are expected to finish in the 2014-2015 fiscal year.⁸**

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 5th day meeting on 4 June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Regarding a question of farmland management, Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Khin Zaw said **that the central farmland management board had no plans to issue farming permits for mobile farms as they move every year from place to place. In addition, the union government is cooperating with state/region governments to eliminate the mobile farming system by developing terrace farms;**
- In responding to **questions concerning cooperative loans for poverty reduction, rural development and improvement of living standard**, Deputy Minister for Cooperatives Than Tun said **loans are offered to groups of five and that people can join cooperative societies irrespective of their race, religion and political affiliation. Small loans are offered at 1.5 per cent interest rate and people can save about K12.5 billion with the cooperative loans. The session also put into record the proposal to form a central committee for modernization of agriculture and livestock breeding development.⁹**

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 1st day meeting on 28 May. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Deputy Minister for Electric Power Aung Than Oo answered questions by two representatives on **distribution of electric power, with details not yet made public.¹⁰**

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 2nd day meeting on 29 May. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **The question of whether a plan to differently tax vehicles and heavy machinery imported through border trading and used in states and regions was feasible or whether a nationwide tax should be applied. Deputy Minister for Finance Dr Maung Maung Thein** said **that the government revenue from taxes on imported vehicle could decrease if vehicles registered in states and regions would be lower taxed. He also said it would pose a major challenge to monitor whether or not the vehicles are really registered in the places claimed;**
- **the Competition Bill submitted by Union Minister Win Myint. According to the Union minister, aimed at protecting the interest of people against monopoly and manipulation, ensuring free and fair trade, allowing mergers and acquisitions in accordance with the laws and removing unwanted restrictions among economic firms.¹¹**

⁸ As Lower House discusses banking and infrastructure, Upper House concerned with environment – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 June 2014 (p. 3)

⁹ Myanmar Stock Exchange to debut in October 2015, deputy minister says in Upper House session – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 June 2014 (p. 3)

¹⁰ Myanmar Parliament reconvenes with talks on anti-terrorism bill, writ petition bill – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/29/05/2014/id-9500> (NLM) 29 May 2014 (p. 2)

¹¹ Deforestation, vehicle and competition tax among top issues in Myanmar Parliament discussions – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/30/05/2014/id-9510> (NLM) 30 May 2013 (p. 3)

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 3rd day meeting on 30 May. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- **Five questions on plans for education, health and shelter for middle and low income government employees, to rebuild embankment for salt water in Tun Yawe Village in Yathedaung Township, to raise wheel tax and other taxes, for living of national races resettled in Maungtaw Township, to establish firewood plantation and the bill amending salary and allowance of Hluttaw MPs, state/region Hluttaw and members of leading bodies of self-administered zones or division** were raised during the session;
- Concerning education, Union Minister Soe Maung said that **health and shelter for low and middle income employees' families, the government had made various arrangements including stipends, health and social insurance policies and housing projects. Regarding the living standard of national races resettled in villages in Maungtaw, Deputy Minister Major-General Maung Maung Ohn explained the measures being implemented by the authorities to improving their livelihood and security.**¹²

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 4th day meeting on 3 June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Regarding a question on environmental conservation to buffer the negative environmental impact from foreign and local investments in the country, the Union Minister for Environmental Conservation and Forestry stressed the need of investors to follow Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), adding that the ministry has the right to turn down any investments that fail to conform to the EIA. The Union Minister was quoted as saying that checks in accordance with EIA are conducted, saying that inspection had been done three times. The Minister also added that after the operation of the business special emphasis is placed on industries such as mining, hydropower projects, which are considered as having greater impact on the environment and people living in the environments of the projects;
- the session also approved four bills that amended package benefits of parliamentarians representing union, region/ state, self-administrative region and Nay Pyi Taw council parliaments.¹³

The 10th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 5th day meeting on 4 June. At the session, the following issues and questions were raised and discussed:

- Deputy Minister Dr Maung Maung Thein said the Ministry of Finance is preparing a draft agreement to establish the Myanmar Stock Exchange as a joint venture among Myanmar Economic Bank, Daiwa Research (DIR) and Japan Stock Exchange and that there are about 200 public companies in Burma. However, only a few fulfilled the requirements to be listed at the stock exchange due to a lack of good management, transparency, tax payment and international standard accounts, the deputy minister pointed out. The stock exchange will start with five qualified companies but the ministry has signed MOUs with only two companies at present. the deputy minister stressed that his ministry is helping other companies to meet the requirements to be listed at the stock exchange;
- The session also agreed to discuss a proposal to urge the union government to take measures for improving "solidarity" between employees and employers.¹⁴

¹² Foreign businesses, general amnesty discussed in Hluttaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-05-31.pdf> (NLM) 31 May 2014 (p. 3)

¹³ As Lower House discusses banking and infrastructure, Upper House concerned with environment – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-04.pdf> (NLM) 4 June 2014 (p. 3)

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 10th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 1st day meeting on 28 May. During the session, the following issues were raised and discussed;

- During the session, members of the Bill Committee submitted two bills—the anti- terrorism bill and 2014 writ petition bill—sent back by the President to Pyidaungsu Hluttaw with remarks. While seeking parliamentary approval for the 2014 writ petition bill, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw decided to approve the bill that was passed in parliament. The session also approved to plans to borrow an agriculture loan of K500 billion from the Central Bank of Myanmar and \$20 million for the Ministry of Education from the Work Bank.¹⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KIA, GOVT START MONTHLY TALKS TO REDUCE HOSTILITIES

Negotiating teams from both the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the government have agreed to meet once a month in a bid to prevent armed clashes between the two sides. The talks will focus on immediate issues, an official from Kachin State's Security and Border Affairs Ministry said. He added that a reduction of hostilities would have a positive impact on prospects for long-term peace.

The decision for both sides to form negotiating teams was made on 13 May meeting between representatives of the Kachin Independence Organisation and the Union Peacemaking Work Committee in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

KIA Colonel Khon Naung, a member of the non-state army's negotiating team, said meetings with Union negotiators would occur in the first week of every month. "If we need to talk more often we will," he added. The Union government's negotiating team was led by Kachin State Minister for Border Affairs and Security Colonel Than Aung and the KIA by Colonel Zaw Taung.¹⁶

BATTLES CONTINUE IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

A series of battles between Kachin Independence Army (KIA) troops and a combined force of Tatmadaw and Pyi Thu Tsits (a.k.a. KKY or Ka-Kwe-Yi or local militia groups) took place on 3 June.

Kachin people's militia (MHH) troops under the 5th section of the KIA's 36th Battalion on Wednesday (3 June) fought against Burmese army's 323rd Light Infantry Regiment (LIR) troops at Nam Ba Tek, Pang Sai Township in northern Shan State. The battle took place at about 2:10 pm as about 50 government troops who had travelled from Hpai Kawng village to Pang Sai City encountered Kachin people militia (MHH) troops at Nam Ba Tek. Another battle also took place in northern Shan State between KIA's 2nd Battalion troops and a combined force of Burmese army's 215th and 217th Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs) troops at Man Jum valley, located between Ta Mung Nye and Maw Han village in Kutkai Township, on 3 June at 2:30 pm.

Similar clashes have also occurred between the KIA's ally Ta-ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State. TNLA's 478th Battalion troops were engaged in a battle against a combined force of about 60 government troops and Pyi Thu Tsits (local militia groups) near Nawng Ang in Nam Kham Township. TNLA's 478th Battalion troops on the previous day fought against a Burmese army's unit under 88th Light Infantry Division (LID) at a location between Nam

¹⁴ Myanmar Stock Exchange to debut in October 2015, deputy minister says in Upper House session – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs18/NLM2014-06-05.pdf> (NLM) 5 June 2014 (p. 3)

¹⁵ Myanmar Parliament reconvenes with talks on anti-terrorism bill, writ petition bill – <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe:zg/newspaper-journal/content/29/05/2014/id-9500> (NLM) 29 May 2014 (p. 2)

¹⁶ KIA, govt start monthly talks to reduce hostilities – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6341:kia-govt-start-monthly-talks-to-reduce-hostilities&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 4 June 2014

Seint and San Kar village in Nam Kham Township. One government soldier died in this battle and no casualties on TNLA side, said a TNLA source. On 2 June, TNLA's 527th Battalion troops engaged in a series of battles against Burmese army units under 77th LID near Pa Hlaing village in Kyauk Me Township. A KIA source said Burmese army's 237th LIB troops based at Dum Bau Bum fired at least 10 rounds of artillery shells on KIA's 204th Tactical Force positions near Mung Hka village in southern Kachin State on 1 June.¹⁷

SUU KYI LAUNCHES SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

On the first day of a nationwide signature campaign organized by Burma's main opposition party and a prominent activist group, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi signed her name to the petition at one of her party's offices in Naypyidaw on 27 May. Suu Kyi arrived at the National League for Democracy (NLD) office in Ottara Thiri Township, where she spoke with nearly 3,000 supporters after signing the petition, said Min Thu, an NLD lawmaker from the township. "She signed at the Ottara Thiri office because she lives in that township when she's in Naypyidaw," the MP said. He said Suu Kyi visited each NLD office of Naypyidaw's five townships, spending nearly 30 minutes at each. She thanked visitors who came to sign the petition and explained why she believes the Constitution should be amended. The signature campaign is organized by the NLD and the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society and will last for two months. It follows two public rallies by both groups in Rangoon and Mandalay last week to show public support for constitutional amendments. Any Burmese citizen who is 18 years or older can sign at the offices of either group across the country.

During a nearly 10-minute speech on 27 May morning, Suu Kyi explained why the NLD and the 88 Generation are focusing specifically on amending Article 436 of the Constitution. "It says that if we don't have approval from army representatives in Parliament, we can't make any change to the charter," she said. "So, please sign to make change. I'm asking you to join us because we want to introduce a peaceful tradition that can bring change."

In Rangoon, the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society also held a petition launching ceremony, joined by hundreds of people including politicians from ethnic parties. "It's an open invitation to anyone to take part in the amendment of the charter," Ko Ko Gyi, a leader of the group, told The Irrawaddy. After the signature campaign ends on 19 July, the NLD and the 88 Generation will review all entries before submitting them to Parliament's Constitution Review Committee. The numbers of participants will not be publicized until the review process is finished.¹⁸

POLITICAL PARTIES WARNED TO STAY ON TOPIC BY ELECTION COMMISSION

The Union Election Commission has threatened political parties with the revocation of their licence if they are found to be campaigning on topics for which they have not received prior consent.

Director of the UEC Thaug Hlaing, in speaking to the media on 26 May said that if a member of the public witnesses a political party breaching this rule then they may lodge a formal complaint with the Union Election Commission. "The commission will then review the incident and the party's licence may be revoked," said Thaug Hlaing. The UEC director added that political parties may organise events at their own offices without the need to seek for permission but things change when the parties enter the public domain. "Once the event becomes a public rally, then it must be held in accordance with the existing law," said Thaug Hlaing.

¹⁷ Battles continue in northern Shan State – <http://kachinlandnews.com/?p=24492> (KNL) 4 June 2014

¹⁸ Suu Kyi launches signature campaign for amendments – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/suu-kyi-launches-signature-campaign-amendments.html> (Irrawaddy) 27 May 2014

Saw Than Myint of the Federal Union Party, an alliance of 16 ethnic political groups, welcomed the message from Thaung Hlaing. “The actions of some of the larger parties are in clear violation of the law and the commission has thus far ignored this,” said Saw Than Myint.

Since the enacting of the ‘The Peaceful Assembly and Procession Act’ in December 2011, the Union Election Commission is no longer responsible for granting permission to hold political rallies. The 2011 law requires organisers provide the Chief of Township Police at least five days’ notice of any gathering. The site, date, time, topic of the assembly and any ‘chants’ must also be provided in advance, as well as the expected number of attendees and the biographies of any speakers.¹⁹

BURMA, BANGLADESH AT ODDS OVER DEADLY BORDER CLASH

Bangladesh has lodged a protest with Burma over what it called an unprovoked attack against its border guards by Burmese security forces on 30 May, following an earlier exchange of fire in which one Bangladeshi guard was killed. Burma has given a different version of events and has warned Bangladesh it will not tolerate any violation of its sovereignty or territory.

Maj-Gen Aziz Ahmed, head of Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), told reporters that a body handed over by the Burmese side was that of guard Mizanur Rahman, 43, who had gone missing on 28 May. In a statement issued on 31 May, the Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry said it had called in Burma’s ambassador to protest at an “unprovoked eruption of gunfire from the Myanmar border force” on 30 May. “The Burmese Ambassador was told that a BGB team was waiting near border pillar no. 52 for identification of the dead body which was proposed by the Burmese side. However, to the complete surprise of the BGB, Burma’s border forces suddenly started firing on the waiting BGB team without any provocation,” it said.

Burma’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Saturday that the first incident on 28 May involved Burmese troops and “two suspected armed Bengalis in yellow camouflage uniform who entered into Myanmar territory” in Maungdaw Township. One was killed and the other fled into Bangladesh, it said. “There was no BGB team patrolling along the border ... on that day, as claimed by the Bangladesh side,” Burma’s Foreign Ministry said. It denied that Burmese troops opened fire on any BGB members and said the clothing worn by the man who was killed did not match the BGB uniform. On the May 30 incident, it said Burma had asked the BGB to “fetch the dead body at the Boundary Pillar 52 where the exchange of fire had occurred.” The allegation that the Burma side started to fire was “far from the reality,” it added.

Bangladesh’s statement noted a reported deployment of Burmese forces along the border and said that violated a 1980 agreement, so the forces should be withdrawn. It added that Burma should not “allow any action that may affect the friendly bilateral relations” between the two. For its part, Burma said it would “resort to diplomatic means to solve problems peacefully in view of existing bilateral friendly relations and good neighbourliness.”²⁰

ANALYSIS

Visits by Japanese Self-Defense Forces Chief of Staff Iwasaki and former British Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir David Richards are steps by the international community to assist the Burmese democratic reform process. Decades of isolation to date has not served to promote Burma nor the international community at large. While the on-going democratic reforms in Burma have been

¹⁹ Political parties warned to stay on topic by Election Commission – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/11254-political-parties-warned-to-stay-on-topic-by-election-commission> (Mizzima) 27 May 2014

²⁰ Burma, Bangladesh at odds over deadly border clash – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-bangladesh-odds-deadly-border-clash.html> (Reuters/Irrawaddy) 2 June 2014

centred on political, social and economic reforms, very little if not any have been done to promote and bring changes to key areas of reforming the military and rule of law. To that extent, the visits by Japanese and British military delegations will no doubt have served in promoting ties between the government in Naypyitaw but more importantly with the Burmese military (Tatmadaw). The outcome of these visits and future visits by military delegations to the country will test the waters on the true commitment of the Tatmadaw towards the on-going reform process in Burma.

While the President has been promoting peace, clashes continue to unfold in north-eastern parts of the country and thus once again cast doubts and even mistrust among the ethnic armed organizations towards the peace process. And if there is to be peace both government forces and those of the ethnic armed organizations involved in the fighting will need to enforce a joint Code of Conduct as soon as possible in order to strengthen the fragile cease-fire agreements. It is therefore incumbent on all parties to the conflict to implement and adhere to such Code of Conduct but more importantly prevent further outbreaks of fighting in the country from reoccurring.