

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.16

OFFICIAL MEDIA

EU LIFTS SANCTIONS ON BURMA

The European Union (EU) has reached an agreement on 22 April to lift sanctions imposed on Burma/Myanmar. According to the announcement issued at the 3236th foreign affairs meeting of European Council held in Luxembourg, the European Union is to remove sanctions against Burma/Myanmar with the exception of the embargo on arms, thus paving the way for both EU and Burmese companies. In a separate statement, the Burmese Foreign Ministry welcomed the EU's decision and stated that it will greatly benefit the Burmese people and government and help to facilitate bilateral cooperation between the EU and Burma.¹

AMNESTY GRANTED FOR 93 PRISONERS

The total number of released prisoners is 90 Burmese citizens and three foreigners, according to a Presidential amnesty issued on 23 April. The prisoners release was implemented *“with a view to ensuring inclusiveness in political processes and further strengthening friendly relations between Burma and its neighbours as well as on humanitarian and social grounds”*. No further details were provided.²

LETPADAUNGTANG COPPER MINING PROJECT FACES MOB PROTESTS

At least one villager was shot and several persons injured when police cracked down on locals in Sete village near the controversial Latpadaung copper mine in Monywa Township. According to state-run media police intervened to prevent local farmers from ploughing on confiscated land. Some 70 villagers including some members of Yangon Public Service Network began working on the land belonging to Ko Khin Nyeint and Ma Yi Yi Win in Sintae Village (Old village) near Lapadaungtaung Copper mine Project on 25 April (Thursday) and were later stopped by security personnel. A quarrel broke out between villagers and police and soon after Section 144 of the Penal Code was declared by the authorities to restore law and order. Regarding the incidents, *“punitive actions will be taken against those who were taken into custody for their anarchic acts and those who committed unrest and violence will be exposed and taken into custody”*. During the incident, fifteen police members and three rioters were injured.³

INDONESIAN PRESIDENT PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO BURMA

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono arrived in Burma on 23 April to begin a two-day official visit at the invitation of Burmese President U Thein Sein. During visit, the two leaders held talks on promoting bilateral ties and economic cooperation between the two countries in a wide range of sectors. The two leaders also agreed on increasing trade volume to \$1 billion in 2014, up from 500 million dollars set when the Burmese President visited Indonesia in May 2012. Following talks between the two presidents, three key accords on economic cooperation were signed between the two countries, namely a framework agreement on investment and trade, two memorandums of

¹ EU lifts all sanctions against Myanmar, except for arms embargo – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p. 16 & 7)/ Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma – http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136918.pdf (European Council) 22 April 2013/

Lifting of all economic sanctions on Myanmar to encourage and engender far stronger Myanmar-EU relationship – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p. 16)

² Amnesty granted for 93 prisoners – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p.9)

³ Letpadaungtaung Copper Mining Project faces mob protests – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-26-op.pdf> (NLM) 26 April 2013 (p. 16 & 7)

understanding (MoU) on cooperation in human resources development and on rice trade respectively. Four additional cooperation accords were also inked including feasibility study for improving energy efficiency in power delivery and loss reduction pilot programs in Yangon; fertilizer production; capacity building in banking sector and development of precast concrete industry and project management services. A business forum jointly organized by the Indonesian Embassy and Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) was also conducted and discussions held on oil and gas, lubricants, construction, banking, ICT, mining, cement, agricultural produces and airline services.⁴

PRESIDENT U THEIN SEIN ATTENDS 22ND ASEAN SUMMIT

Burmese President Thein Sein and other South East Asian leaders arrived in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei to attend the 22nd ASEAN Summit Meeting. At the meeting, leaders from the 10 ASEAN countries expressed their determination to strengthen cooperation and efforts in addressing issues on including terrorism, transnational crime, trafficking in persons and landmines. In addressing the 22nd ASEAN Summit retreat, President Thein Sein expressed his readiness to support for rethink of the ASEAN Charter; calling for redoubling efforts for complete realization of ASEAN Economic Community; the need to adopt national economic plans on environmental conservation; to encourage active public participation in establishing genuine ASEAN Community to pave the way for people-centred community and also expressed his thanks to ASEAN fellow countries for their support in ending the economic sanctions imposed on Burma by the EU. On the sidelines of the Summit, President Thein Sein also held bilateral talks with Thai Premier Yingluck Shinawatra exchanged views on further promoting existing ties between the two countries, investment of Thai entrepreneurs, encouragement by the two governments for soonest completion of Dawei Special Economic Zone and cooperation in rehabilitation of Burmese nationals in refugees camps along the Thai- Burma border.

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC LANGUAGES TO BE TAUGHT 'AFTER HOURS' IN STATE SCHOOLS

Ethnic languages are set to be included in state primary schools' curriculum during the 2013-14 educational year; however, the classes will be held outside of normal school hours. In accordance with new legislation that was announced by Burma's Minister for Education Mya Aye last June, students in the country's ethnic regions will be taught their respective languages through the second grade. According to Mon state's Minister of Culture Min Nwe Soe, the union government will now allow government schools to teach Mon literature as a part of their curriculum, as long as it's outside of school hours. In Arakan (Rakhine) State, Buddhist monk Ashin Kuthala who is helping draft the state's curriculum said Arakanese textbooks should be available for students from kindergarten to second grade this term. However, other administrators in the country's ethnic states said the government has been unresponsive and has yet to approve their new curriculum. Nang Woe Hseng from the Shan Syllabus Drafting Committee said a draft of their Shan curriculum was submitted to

⁴ Indonesian President, wife arrive in Nay Pyi Taw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p.9)/
Indonesia supports Myanmar's crisis management process – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p. 16)/
MoUs inked between Myanmar and Indonesia – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p. 16)/
Myanmar, Indonesia vow to increase trade volume – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-24.pdf> (NLM) 24 April 2013 (p. 1)/
Indonesian President and wife conclude visit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-25.pdf> (NLM) 25 April 2013 (p. 16)

the government last February; however, they have yet to receive any feedback from the government.⁵

SHAN MOVEMENT PREPARES FOR POLITICAL PARLEY

The Shan State Army (SSA) South held an ad hoc meeting on Tuesday, 23 April, at its Loi Taileng base, to discuss preparations for political dialogue with Naypyitaw.

The one-day discussion was based on the draft Framework for Political Dialogue, prepared by the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), which was formed in June 2012 by a coalition of armed resistance movements.

This was the second meeting held to consider the draft with the first meeting being held on 15 January. The framework, among others, includes Core Principles, Roadmap, Agenda, Composition (who should participate in the dialogue) and Structure (how the peace conference should be organized).

The proposed agenda included matters related to the following:

- Power sharing
- Security sector reform
- Constitutional reform
- Economic development and reform
- Humanitarian aid and relief
- Judicial reform and Basic human rights
- Land reform
- National reconciliation⁶

ANALYSIS

The recent clashes between local villagers and riot police in Sete village on 25 April have once again ignited the unresolved problem of the Letpadaungtaung copper mine project in Monywa region. Since the mine protests began in February 2012, the government on its part has established a 15-member ministerial implementation body led by Minister at the President's Office U Hla Tun, to address the issue and but it has thus far failed to deliver on its mandate. The question of the Letpadaungtaung mine has attracted attention not only for its economic interests but more importantly on how the government handles peaceful protests and land rights issues. The continued clashes therefore raises doubts as to the success of the on-going reforms and the government's genuine commitment to bring about real changes in the country. On a more positive note, the release of 93 prisoners under a Presidential amnesty should be welcomed. However, a cause for concern is the plight of those still under detention throughout the country. The authorities should consider releasing all remaining political prisoners in the true spirit of achieving national reconciliation.

⁵ Ethnic languages to be taught 'after hours' in state schools –
<http://www.dvb.no/news/ethnic-languages-to-be-taught-%E2%80%98after-hours%E2%80%99-in-state-schools/27703>
(DVB) 23 April 2013

⁶ Shan movement prepares for political parley –
http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5378:shan-movement-prepares-for-political-parley&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N) 25 April 2013