

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 30

OFFICIAL MEDIA

UPPER HOUSE SPEAKER ATTENDS ASEP-7 MEETING

A parliamentary delegation led by the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu (Union Parliament) and Amyotha Hluttaws (National Parliament) U Khin Aung Myint attended the 7th Asian-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP-7) from 3 to 5 October in Laos. During the meeting, themed “Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership for Sustainable Development”, Australia, Burma, Russia and New Zealand were to be sworn in as new members. The President of the Lao National Assembly, Pany Yathotou, said in a welcome message that since its inception in 1996, the ASEP process has contributed in strengthening friendly relations and intensive cooperation between Parliaments of Asia and Europe in political, social and economic fields and promoting mutual understanding and common interest. She also added that the achievements reflect the determination and commitment of peoples of Asia and Europe to enhance cooperation and to explore ways and means to alleviate the impact of current challenges faced by the two regions as well as future challenges that may occur. The purpose of the meeting was also to discuss and make preparations for the upcoming 9th Asia-Europe Summit Meeting (ASEM) to be held on 5-6 November 2012 in Vientiane. Afterwards, the delegation left for an official visit to Australia from 7 to 12 October.¹

GERMAN DEPUTY FM PIEPER VISITS BURMA

German Deputy Federal Foreign Minister Cornelia Pieper visited Burma from 27-29 September where she held meetings with her Burmese counterpart Deputy FM U Thant Kyaw, as well as Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Htay Aung, and Minister for Culture U Aye Myint Kyu. They discussed the further strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries, mutual cultural cooperation and future programmes, the upcoming 27th SEA Games in Burma, and a blueprint for responsible tourism drawn up in collaboration with the German Hanns Seidel Foundation. Minister Pieper and Deputy Minister of Culture Daw Sanda Khin also signed a joint declaration of intent regarding cultural relations between the two countries with the aim to reopen the Goethe-Institute in Rangoon.²

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KNU UNITY STRAINED BY KNLA HEAD'S UNAUTHORIZED TRIP TO HPA-AN TO MEET GOVT & OPEN LIAISON OFFICE

The Karen National Union (KNU) says it will take legal action against the head of its armed wing for making an unauthorized trip to the Karen State capital Hpa-an to open a new liaison office as part of a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government. In a statement released on 27 September³, the KNU said that Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) leader Gen. Mutu Say Poe and 30 other Karen military commanders left for Hpa-an without informing the group's leadership. KNU Joint-Secretary (1) Saw Hla Ngwe told local media that legal action would be taken against Mutu Say Poe

¹ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker and party to attend ASEP-7 meeting – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-02.pdf> (NLM) 2 October 2012 (p. 16) / Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting kicks off in Laos – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-04.pdf> (NLM/Xinhua) 4 October 2012 (p. 11)

² Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister meets German counterpart – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 September 2012 (p. 2) / Myanmar, Germany eye cultural Cooperation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 September 2012 (p. 2) / Union Hotels and Tourism Minister meets German delegation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-29.pdf> (NLM) 29 September 2012 (p. 2) / Press Statement – Kick-off for re-opening of a Goethe Institute in Rangoon – <http://www.rangun.diplo.de/contentblob/3681902/Daten/2703243/GoetheInstitut.pdf> (German Embassy, Yangon) 4 October 2012

³ Statement of KNU Supreme Headquarters on Opening of Central Level Liaison Office in Hpa-an – <http://www.karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/statement-of-knu-supreme-headquarters-on-opening-of-central-level-liaison-o> (Karen National Union) 27 September 2012

in accordance with KNU regulations, but declined to say, however, if the general would be removed as the KNLA head. He added that Mutu Say Poe ignored a meeting called by the KNU central committee and departed for Hpa-an to meet with Burmese officials and open the new office with leaders and representatives of KNLA brigades 4, 6 and 7.

Some Karen observers on the border say the move is further evidence of a widening crack within the Karen leadership along military and civilian lines. They say top KNU and KNLA leaders have been increasingly at odds since the 3rd round of peace talks was held in Hpa-an in early September 2012.

Meanwhile, there is also talk of an ideological division within the KNLA, between brigades 5 and 2 on the one hand, and brigades 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7 on the other. The former group is reportedly opposed to the peace deal, while the latter is said to support it. Hla Ngwe insisted, however, that Mutu Say Poe's decision to go to Hpa-an would not affect the ceasefire agreement. In 2006, former Brigade 7 Commander Htain Maung left the group with about 300 soldiers and civilians to stay in government-controlled territories in Karen State. Some worry that the conflicts within the KNU leadership could delay or even harm the peace process.⁴ (*Please see Appendix A for the text of the KNU statement*)

ETHNIC MPs: MINORITIES STILL NEGLECTED

According to some ethnic members of parliament the rights of Burma's ethnic minorities are still not being respected despite recent political reforms. During a trip to Chiang Mai, a group of MPs expressed their dissatisfaction with President Thein Sein's administration, noting that he had yet to appoint a single ethnic member to any senior union-level positions. "They talk a lot about giving rights to ethnic people, but it's all just on paper," said Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw) MP Khuang Ling from the Chin National Progressive Party (CNPP), adding that a proposal by different MPs asking the President to appoint ethnic representatives to positions at the union level was turned down. Similarly, Lower House MP U Ba Shein of the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) said that while there has been talk of promoting ethnic rights, the government is wary of appointing ethnic representatives to such senior positions. The MPs also complained that their proposals in Parliament—on everything from teaching ethnic languages to poverty alleviation in remote areas—have received very little attention from the government. Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw) MP Min Myo Thit Lwin from the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMRDP) said that the government doesn't want to encourage ethnic language education because it has long pursued a policy of promoting Burmese culture at the expense of other cultures. Some of the MPs noted that the government rarely uses the word "union" to describe the whole country recently, preferring instead to speak of "national politics"—a preference they see as an attempt to erase Burma's identity as a union of numerous ethnic groups. "It's wrong to talk about 'national politics' in a country formed by many different ethnic peoples," said Dixon Tun Lin, an executive member of the Karen People's Party.⁵

ARAKAN (RAKHINE) PUBLIC MEETING HELD IN RATHIDAUNG

The largest public meeting in Rakhine State since Independence in 1948 was successfully held from 24-26 September in Rathidaung Township with the purpose of seeking solutions to avoid future crises and conflicts similar to those which occurred in June 2012. Around 2000 people and representatives from the 17 different townships as well as those from political and social organizations in Arakan State attended and presented papers and exchanged views. According to the spokesman of the meeting U Ko Ko Maung 18 resolutions, 6 objections and 3 suggestions (proposals) were adopted. These are to be submitted to President Thein Sein, the parliament speakers, as well as the Arakan investigative commission on the recent violence and individual representatives of parliament.

Some of the key resolutions included:

- to strengthen border security to prevent illegal immigration

⁴KNU Unity Strained by KNLA Head's Pa-an Trip – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/15211> (Irrawaddy) 28 September 2012

⁵Minorities Still Neglected, Say Ethnic MPs – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/15766> (Irrawaddy) 4 October 2012

- to control the birth rate of Muslim Bengalis in Rakhine State
- to implement strict adherence of the 1982 Citizenship Laws
- the return of confiscated lands to their rightful owners

They also agreed to oppose the presence of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Rakhine State and suggested all Arakan (Rakhine) organizations should network in order to promote the development of the State.⁶

(Please see Appendix B for the full text of resolutions, objections and proposals adopted at the meeting).

ANALYSIS

The Karen National Union's (KNU) decision to dismiss three senior officials from its leadership for violating the group's protocol comes at time when the national reconciliation process is under-going a crucial stage with peace talks pending and clashes still on-going between government forces and armed groups in Kachin and Shan States. At such a time, removing prominent Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) General Mutu Say Poe and two other senior KNLA members will not help the process but only cast further doubts concerning the KNU leadership. How the KNU leadership addresses this issue will become crucial not only for its relations with the KNLA but also for the peace process with the Naypyitaw government. Furthermore and more significantly, the response of President Thein Sein's government towards the KNLA and KNU will now need to be more transparent than ever before. In the past, the government has been accused of practicing a '*divide and rule*' policy towards the ethnic armed groups, and the removal of Mutu Say Poe will only add to such doubts and suspicions. If rifts or divisions or even conflicts of interests exist among or within the different ethnic groups, now is the time to address them. Any further delay in addressing such issues could threaten the entire peace process. The responses and actions of both the government and the ethnic armed groups remain crucial if there is to be genuine peace.

⁶ Arakan public meeting successfully concludes in Rathidaung –

<http://www.narinjara.com/main/index.php/arakan-public-meeting-successfully-concludes-in-rahindaung/> (Narinjara) 29 September 2012

Appendix A:

**Statement of KNU Supreme Headquarters
on Opening of Central Level Liaison Office in Hpa-An**

27 September 2012

Today, September 27, 2012, Lt. Gen. Mutu Say Po, together with a 30-men group consisting of some district and brigade leaders, is intending to go to Hpa-an town to meet with the Burmese (Myanmar) government and open a central level liaison office on September 29.

As this trip is not arranged by the Karen National Union (KNU) as well as by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the KNU Supreme Headquarters does not have any knowledge of agenda of the group.

In the negotiation meetings, every agreement signed by the two sides has been performed as the agreement between the Burmese government and the KNU. It is not a special, separate agreement between the KNLA and the Burmese government.

The KNLA is under the administration of the Defense Department, which is one of the 14 departments of the KNU.

The KNU has firmly resolved to achieve genuine peace by resolving the political problems by political means. In order to achieve that end, the KNU has laid down a program to conduct negotiations progressively and systematically.

Karen National Union
Supreme Headquarters⁷

⁷ Statement of KNU Supreme Headquarters on Opening of Central Level Liaison Office in Hpa-an – <http://www.karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/statement-of-knu-supreme-headquarters-on-opening-of-central-level-liaison-o> (Karen National Union) 27 September 2012

Appendix B:

**Resolutions, Objections and Proposals
Adopted at the Public Meeting Held in Rathidaung, Rakhine State**

Resolutions:

1. To strength the security forces to guard the western border and Arakan Sea because there are still illegal immigrants entering Arakan state from neighboring countries.
2. To help and promote by central government in Arakan state economic zones that will be implemented by Arakanese businessmen in order to prevent the dropping of Arakan population in Arakan state.
3. To give and allocate some shares from state revenues of natural resources produced from Arakan state to Arakanese people.
4. To lay down a rule to be controlled the birth rate of the Muslim Bengali community living in Arakan.
5. To restrict the unmoved properties by non-citizens.
6. To form a people militia in all ethnic villages along the border and to supply sophisticated arms to the people's militia.
7. To implement strictly the 1982 citizenship laws.
8. To monitor by government authority UN and INGOs activities in Arakan state.
9. To take action after searching and revealing the root cause of Islamic extremist militants in Myanmar.
10. To return lands including farms and orchid lands back to Arakanese families who lost the lands in the 1942 communal riot in Arakan.
11. To remove some Bengali villages located near Sittwe University and beside traffic communication roads throughout Arakan state.
12. To implement the Sai Din hydro power plant immediately.
13. To take responsibility for all government employee's security on border.
14. To monitor whether religious teachers follow directives after government authorities scrutinize and allow the curriculum of madressar schools.
15. To implement what President U Thein Sein told chief of UNHCR on 11 July 2012.
16. To return back all confiscated lands by the Burmese army to all owners.
17. To stop the system of auction on creeks, river and sea after allocating fishing plots one by one.
18. To carry out the construction of all commuter roads in Arakan including railways and highways immediately

Objections:

1. To oppose the plan to put Buddhist and Muslim people together due to their bitter experiences from recent violence in Arakan.
2. To oppose OIC intervention in state affairs as well as the plan of opening an office anywhere in Arakan state.
3. To oppose the project of Lay Myo River hydro power plant.
4. To oppose all media out and inside which use the term of Rohingya.
5. To oppose those Bengali representatives in the parliament who illegally regain national ID cards.
6. To oppose those Bengali people who are using the valuable national identities including symbols, heritages that belong to Arakanese nationals.

Suggestions:

1. All political parties including RNDP, ALD, ALP, USDP and NUP support resolutions submitted to Government to get attention.
2. To unite all political parties that represents the Rakhine people.
3. To hand and promote networking among all Arakan organizations in and out of Arakan state to develop of Arakan state.⁸

⁸ Arakan public meeting successfully concludes in Rathidaung –
<http://www.narinjara.com/main/index.php/arakan-public-meeting-successfully-concludes-in-rahindaung/> (Narinjara) 29 September 2012