
POLITICAL MONITOR NO.10

OFFICIAL MEDIA

FINNISH LEADERS RECEIVE BURMESE PRESIDENT

As part of his five-nation European tour, Burmese President Thein Sein arrived in Helsinki 2 February and held meetings with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and Noble Laureate Mr Martti Ahtisaari. Discussions were focussed Burma's on-going political reforms, peace-making processes and providing assistance in promoting human development tasks. The Finnish President Niinisto stated that his country would assist Burma in the establishment of good governance, rule of law and peace-making processes in the country. Former President and Noble Laureate Mr Ahtisaari discussed the role of the Crisis Management Initiative Group's efforts in urging EU to engage with Burma.¹

AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR FULLY LIFTING EU SANCTIONS

Austrian President Dr. Heinz Fisher welcomed the visiting Burmese President in Vienna on 5 March. The two leaders discussed political reforms, nation-building endeavours, peace making process with national races armed groups as well as the full lifting of sanctions imposed on Burma by the EU. President Thein Sein also held talks with Austrian Prime Minister Mr. Werner Faymann and Speaker of Parliament Mrs Barbara Prammer and discussed further strengthening of ties at the inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary and people to people levels. He also attended the Burma/Myanmar-Austria Economic Forum, and urged those present to invest in Burma and promote better relations between the two countries.²

PRESIDENTS OF EUROPEAN COUNCIL, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RECEIVE BURMESE LEADER

During his two-day visit to Brussels, President Thein Sein called on the heads of the three EU institutions: Mr Rompuy of the European Council, Mr Barroso of the Commission and Martin Schulz from the EU Parliament as well as the Chief of International Relations and Security Policy Ms Catherine Ashton. In their official talks, the two sides discussed democratic reforms, peace-making processes with ethnic groups as well as promoting cooperation in education, health, tourism and exchange of culture between Burma/Myanmar and EU, the raising of human rights and lifting of sanctions. President Thein Sein also attended the signing ceremony on cooperation in Crisis Response between the EU and Burma on 6 March.³

ITALY AGREES TO LIFTING OF EU SANCTIONS AGAINST BURMA

The Burmese President arrived in Rome on 7 March and called on his Italian counterpart Mr Giorgio Napolitano at Quieinale Palace. The two leaders held talks on ongoing political economic reforms, promotion of human rights, peace process in Myanmar, closer cooperation in trade, culture and other sectors, assistance in Myanmar's agricultural development drive and microfinance works, and cooperation between the two armed forces. President Thein Sein also met Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti and discussed a wide range of issues including the situation in Kachin and Rakhine states and further strengthening of bilateral ties between the two countries. During the visit, the

¹ Political reform process is being implemented by means of all inclusiveness of all political parties and peace-making with national races armed groups –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/33newsn.pdf> (NLM) 3 March 2013 (p. 1)

² Austrian President pledges support for fully lifting of EU sanctions against Myanmar –
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/63newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 March 2013 (p. 1)

³ President U Thein Sein meets Presidents of European Council, European Parliament –
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/73newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 March 2013 (p. 9)/

Work towards a new and more inclusive Myanmar –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/73newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 March 2013 (p. 1)/

We will continue tirelessly on the path to peace until we have a peace that is just and durable –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/73newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 March 2013 (p. 16)

Agreement on the Treatment (Cancellation and Rescheduling) of the Debt and Agreement on Debt-for-Development Swap was also signed. The Italian President and Prime Minister recognized the positive changes taking place in the country and promised to offer more help and closer cooperation and agreed that EU should lift the overall sanctions against Burma.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 22nd day meeting on 6th March. During the session issues the following key issues **were raised and discussed**.

- Daw Nan Wah Nu of Kunhing Constituency (SNDP) asked about **plans for dissemination of knowledge about existing laws, bylaws and procedures wide and far-up to rural regions and calling the rule of law as a prerequisite for flourishing of democracy**. She also called for **publishing books on laws in ethnic languages, saying that such books are not easily accessible to the general public**;
- U Khine Maung Yi of Ahlon Constituency (NDF) asked the government for **granting a general amnesty**. The Minister at the President's Office U Soe Maung responded and **rejected the proposal submitted**;
- Daw Khin Saw Wai of Yathedaung Constituency (RNDP) asked for **adoption of a policy to bring about 30 per cent representation of women in respective legislative, executive and judicial bodies at Union and region/state level**. However, according to answer of the representatives from judicial and executive institutions, **the proportion of women in such institutions is more than 30 per cent and some even reaching to over 60 per cent**.⁵

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 23rd day meeting on 7th March. During the session discussions were focused on the following:

- Union Minister for Information U Aung Kyi discussed **the Printing and Publishing Law Draft and stated that paragraph 3 of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, respected the individual rights and dignity, national security, public order, public health and morality despite freedom of expression and allows enactment of necessary legislations**. The Minister concluded that **the draft prepared by the Information Ministry absolutely does not disrupt the freedom of expression and publishing aimed to safeguard the national interests but ensures security and convenience for all printers, publishers and journalists, urging the Hluttaw to take serious consideration regarding the draft law**.⁶

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 22nd day meeting on 6th March. During the session the following issues were raised and answered:

- U Zone Hle Htan of Chin State Constituency No.2 (CPP) submitted a **proposal urging the Union government to review the grant of the licenses for mining plots in forest reserves and protected forests, giving the priority to the poorest Chin State for the reason of poverty alleviation tasks**. The Union Minister for Mines Dr Myint Aung replied that **the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry would provide assistance with least environmental damages for Chin State development**;

⁴ Italy agrees lifting of overall EU sanctions against Myanmar – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/83newsn1.pdf> (NLM) 8 March 2013 (p. 1)

⁵ Hluttaw representative's call for granting general amnesty rejected – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/73newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 March 2013 (p. 10)

⁶ Printing and Publishing Bill not disrupt freedom of expression, publishing – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/83newsn1.pdf> (NLM) 8 March 2013 (p.16)

- U Hla Swe of Magway Region Constituency No. 12 (USDP) submitted a **proposal urging the Union government to ask the government of the United States of America to completely remove of sanctions on gems and jewellery.** MP U San Pyae of Kachin State Constituency No.7 (USDP) said that due to the sanctions, both countries had to suffer the losses and that providing assistance and cooperation would bring about human rights and democracy rights in the country. In responding to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs U Zin Yaw replied that due to **Burma's political reforms, the country had seen international recognitions, assistances and lifting of sanctions. The complete removal of sanction relied on US Congress and needed cooperation between governments, legal and technical experts, Hluttaw representatives, political parties and all social community. The proposal was approved by the session.**⁷

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 23rd day meeting on 7th March. During the session the following issue was raised and answered:

- Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye of Kayin State Constituency No.6 (USDP) submitted the proposal urging **the Union government to upgrade Muse-105th Mile Border Trade Zone and to implement Muse development plan.** With regard to the proposal, Union Minister for Commerce U Win Myint replied that **Muse- 105th mile border trade zone was implemented in April, 2005 with the aim to establish market on Burma's side of the border; to promote sale of local products at desired prices; to earn more export earnings by selling value-added products and to systematically transform from border trade to normal trade. It was commissioned into service on 11 April, 2006 and private companies would be allowed through B.O.T system to upgrade it into international standard trading zone. He also added that the Muse development plan would include improvement of roads, high-way bus terminal project, housing, airport and hotels.**⁸

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 16th day meeting on 1st March. During the session the following key issues were discussed:

- The proposal submitted by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development regarding the **budget for purchase of vehicles including five armoured cars to be used in upcoming World Economic Forum, XXVII SEA Games and ASEAN Summit and related meetings** in Burma/Myanmar as mentioned in appendix 2 (a) of National Planning Bill for 2013-2014 fiscal year was discussed at the session. In responding to queries raised, the Union Minister Dr Kan Zaw replied that the proposed-budget for 2013-2014 fiscal year included the already-approved budget for the purchase of vehicles, except five bulletproof Mercedes-Benz V6s. In seeking the approval of the Hluttaw, the ministry's proposal was in favour of the majority;
- U Steven Thabeik of Chin State Constituency No (4) (CNP) tabled a proposal **to reduce the proposed-budget of the Ministry of Defence of the ministry for 2013-2014 fiscal year.** In responding Defence Minister Lt-Gen Wai Lwin said that **it was impossible to further reduce the proposed-budget for the ministry and that the difference between the amount of money deducted from the initial budget and the final budget submitted to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw had reached K 224.8 billion.** The motion was put to a vote in Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and failed to win the majority vote needed.⁹

⁷ Complete removal of sanction relies on US Congress –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/73newsn.pdf> (NLM) 7 March 2013 (p. 10)

⁸ Muse-105th mile border trade zone to be upgraded into international standard one –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/83newsn1.pdf> (NLM) 8 March 2013 (p. 16)

⁹ Budget for purchase of five bulletproof vehicles sparks lively debate in Pyidaungsu Hluttaw –

<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/23newsn.pdf> (NLM) 2 March 2013 (p.16)

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 17th day meeting on 5th March. During the session the following key issue was discussed:

- MPs held discussions on the **signing of the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards 1958 (New York Convention)**. During the debate, MP Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of Kawhmu Constituency (NLD) stated that, **“trust was crucial in making the country’s economy a success. No matter what legislation is enacted and no matter what agreement is signed, no potential investor would make investment unless they have confidence in (political) landscape of the country,”** she added. Daw Suu Kyi also called for preparing what is necessary, reiterating internal strength and competence as sine qua non to serve the interests of the citizens to the fullest and stressed the need of local judicial system to meet the international norms, recommending that legal experts should improve their professional knowledge of arbitration. The Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung warned **against the over-reliance on donor countries and associations, calling for a focus on software development rather than hardware development. Other MPs also spoke in favour of signing the convention with all agreeing it as a prerequisite to attract foreign investment.** The Pyidaungsu Assembly agreed to sign the convention.¹⁰

NATIONAL RACES LANGUAGES TO BE INTRODUCED TO CHILDREN

A coordination meeting for teaching of national races languages was held at the Ministry of Education on 1 March. At the meeting, Vice-President Dr Sai Mauk Kham gave an address and said that national races languages, literary, culture and customs and tradition is the cultural heritage of the country which needed to be handed down from one generation to another. In the past efforts teaching of national race languages and literary in was implemented in successive eras though stopped in 1981-1982 academic year as English language was added to the syllabus. In developing the country, the government is doing its utmost in promoting education standards as a basic need and providing knowledge to the people so that would not lag far behind those from other countries.¹¹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

NLD TO DECIDE ON READMITTING FORMER MEMBERS AT CONFERENCE

Burma’s main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), will decide whether to accept its former members at its upcoming nationwide assembly, according to party sources. On March 8-10, the NLD will hold its first party congress in 25 years in the former capital Rangoon. It will also be the first time the party has had a chance to decide whether to readmit those who split, resigned or were suspended from the party but later reapplied for membership. Win Tin, a senior party figure, said that the three-day conference will not only focus on policy matters and rules and regulations, but also consider what to do about lapsed members. “Of course, we will review their applications,” he said. “We don’t have any policy against reaccepting them. The congress will lay down a policy on them, including those who were charged or suspended by the party and who resigned from membership.” Ohn Kyaing,¹² head of NLD’s Information Department, echoed Win Tin, adding that such decisions on whether to accept former members can only be made at the congress

¹⁰ Trust is a must to attract foreign investment: MP –
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/63newsn.pdf> (NLM) 6 March 2013 (p. 16)

¹¹ National races languages to be introduced to children –
<http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newpaper/23newsn.pdf> (NLM) 2 March 2013 (p.16)

¹² NLD to Decide on Readmitting Former Members at Conference –
<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/28352> (Irrawaddy) 4 March 2013

and is expected to be attended by about 900 party members from 260 townships from all over Burma.¹³

WA, MONGLA TO JOIN KACHIN-NAYPYITAW PEACE TALKS

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) have been invited to attend the next round of peace talks between the Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA) and the Union Peacemaking Working Committee (UPWC) led by U Aung Min scheduled to be held later this month in Ruili, Yunnan province. Those invited to attend include UWSA leaders Zhao Zhongdang, the Deputy Commander in Chief, Li Julie (a) U Aung Myint, CEC member and a yet-to-be identified senior member of the group. Representatives from the 11 member United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), one of which is the KIO/KIA, as well as Restoration Council of Shan State / Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), a non-member, have also been invited to witness the meeting.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

President Thein Sein's five nation tour of Europe is a clear indication of the Burmese government's eagerness to re-engage with the EU and its members. In the past, due to the sanctions imposed by the EU on Burma, engagement at the highest level was unthinkable. The meetings in Brussels with the presidents of the EU Council, Parliament and Commission are signs that cooperation and readiness to engage with Burma are now gaining momentum. The Burmese leader in meeting his counterparts and EU officials urged for the complete removal of sanctions as well as reinstating the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) to Burma. The EU on its part while welcoming the reform process has committed more flow of aid to the country while at the same time adopting a wait and see approach. The realisation by both the EU and Burma of the need to enter a phase of engagement and cooperation will indeed promote better relations and understanding between the two. As part of its re-engagement policy, the EU has been in the fore-front in providing assistance to end the conflict between the government and ethnic armed groups.

¹³ NLD to Decide on Readmitting Former Members at Conference – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/28352> (Irrawaddy) 4 March 2013

¹⁴ Wa, Mongla to join Kachin-Naypyitaw peace talks – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5292:wa-mongla-to-join-kachin-naypyitaw-peace-talks&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) 7 March 2013