

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.34

OFFICIAL MEDIA

AMNESTY GRANTED TO 56 PRISONERS

In an effort to achieve national reconciliation, President Thein Sein granted amnesty to 56 prisoners on 8 October, in accordance with Section 204 (a) of the Constitution and Section 401, Subsection (1) of Code of Criminal Procedure. While state-run media did not give details on those released, Bo Kyi form the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a group that monitors prisoners of conscience held in Burma, stated that those released included former members of from the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).¹

GOVERNMENT AND KIO SIGN AGREEMENT

The Union Peace-Making Work Committee (UPWC) and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) signed a 7-point agreement on 10 October for closer cooperation and working towards a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and lay foundation for political dialogue. The two sides held talks over progress in de-escalation of conflict since the 30 May Agreement, matters on the NCA, political dialogue, troops of both sides, commitment to end all fighting, according to Aung Min, the Vice-Chairman of the Union Peace-Making Work Committee. The agreement also included the establishment of a Joint Monitoring Committee in principle and development of a plan for resettlement of internally displaced peoples IDPs. The meeting was also attended by senior government and military officials, UN Special Envoy Vijay Nambiar, Chinese Special Envoy Wang Yin Fan and representatives from Karen National Union (KNU), Restoration Council of Shan State – Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), United Wa State Army (UWSA), All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), Palaung State Liberation Front – Taang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), Chin National Front (CNF) and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA). *(Please see Appendix A for full text of the Agreement).*²

AUNG MIN MEETS ETHNIC GROUPS

Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee Union Minister at the President's Office Aung Min met with several ethnic peace delegations from KNU, RCSS/SSA, UWSA, ABSDF, MNSP, PLNO, SSPP, PSLF/TNLA, CNF and NDAA who attended the meeting between the government and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in Myitkyina on 7 October. Minister Aung Min said to them that negotiations are being carried out to sign ceasefire agreements, and that efforts are being made to ensure basic agreements accepted by all of the ethnic groups to continue political dialogue by signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement with all of them. He invited the delegations to report their requirements and difficulties to the government and stressed the role of the representatives from

¹ Amnesty granted –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-09-red.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2013 (p. 16) /

56 political activists to be released from Burma's prisons on Tuesday -

<http://www.dvb.no/news/56-political-activists-to-be-released-from-burmas-prisons-on-tuesday-myanmar/33190> (DVB)

8 October 2013

² Great strides in ensuring peace needed for passing down sound foundations to the next generation –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-09-red.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2013 (p.1 & 8)/

Union Peace-making Work Committee, KIO continue peace talks on political and military affairs –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9) /

UPWC, KIO build understanding, trust, reach agreement –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 1 & 7) /

UPWC, KIO sign new Agreement –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 1 & 7)

the ethnic groups in making peace a reality. The groups reported that they discussed the ceasefire, political dialogue, as well as federalism.³

UNION PEACE COMMITTEE MEETS WITH LEADERS OF “WA” AND MONGLA REGIONS

The Union Peace-making Working Committee and leaders of “Wa” Special Region-2 and Mongla Special Region (4) held talks and discussed the on-going peace process, 2014 national census and regional development projects on 4 October in Pangsan. The Vice Chair of the Committee Thein Zaw urged the Wa and Mongla leaders to cooperate with the government in the peace process, to build trust between the two sides as part of efforts to participate in building a democratic nation and to reach a ceasefire agreement covering the whole country. He also asked them to cooperate with the government in the 2014 national census which will take place from 30 March to 10 April 2014.⁴

BURMA ASSUMES ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP

President Thein Sein attended the 23rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit held in Brunei from 8-10 October, where Burma took over the Chairmanship of the 10-member regional bloc. In his address at the handing over ceremony, the President pledged that Burma will take concrete steps to carry out the remaining tasks of the ASEAN Community Roadmap together with ASEAN member countries, while striving for the emergence of a follow-up task further strengthening the ASEAN Community. He vowed to cooperate with all ASEAN member countries to ensure a peaceful and prosperous community. Towards this end, “Moving Forward in Unity, to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community” was chosen as the motto of the ASEAN Chairmanship for 2014, he said. As a responsible member nation, he added that Burma will be working hard for success of the ASEAN and expressed his belief that he will be able to successfully take the chairmanship with the help of member countries. He also attended the 16th ASEAN plus Three Summit, the 8th East Asia Summit, the 11th ASEAN-India Summit and 5th ASEAN-UN Summit, the 16th ASEAN-Japan Summit, 16th ASEAN-Korean Summit, 16th ASEAN-China Summit and the 1st ASEAN-US Summit and met leaders from ASEAN member countries, as well as Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Korean President Park Guanhye.⁵

³ Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee meets national race peace groups – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 October 2013 (p. 9)

⁴ Union Peace-making Work Committee, “Wa” Special Region-2 leaders hold talks over peace, 2014-census – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-07-red.pdf> (NLM) 7 October 2013 (p. 16 & 8) / Priority being given to implementing national races affairs – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 October 2013 (p. 1)

⁵ President U Thein Sein leaves for Brunei to attend 23rd ASEAN Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-09-red.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2013 (p. 1) / President U Thein Sein attends closing of 23rd ASEAN Summit, handover of ASEAN Chairmanship to Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9) / Myanmar hopes continuous support from dialogue partners as ASEAN chair – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 1 & 7) / President U Thein Sein meets Thai PM, US Secretary of State, Brunei King, New Zealand PM – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 16 & 8) / President U Thein Sein attends 16thASEAN-Japan, ASEAN-Korea, ASEAN-China, ASEAN-US Summits – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9) / President U Thein Sein meets Vietnamese PM, Chinese Premier, ROK President – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 7)

SPEAKER SHWE MANN ATTENDS 129TH INTER- PARLIAMENTARY UNION ASSEMBLY

Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann attended 129th assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held in Geneva from 7 to 9 October. The Speaker addressed the General Debate on Emergency Items on 8 October and ALSO briefed the session on the political developments as well as the roles of the Hluttaws in Burma's reform process. In addition, he held meetings with IPU delegations from Morocco, Ireland, Australia, Iran and South Africa and exchanged views on promoting bilateral cooperation and parliamentary affairs.⁶

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 8th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 4th day meeting on 7 October. U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency **submitted a bill to amend the Electronic Transaction Law (State Peace and Development Council Law No (5/2004)** and Bill Committee member Daw Khin Htay Kywe **read out the committee's report.**⁷

The 8th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 5th day meeting on 8 October. U Myint Oo of Thanatpin Constituency raised the **question in the issuance of citizenship scrutiny cards and issues related to the upcoming census in 2014.** Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population U Kyaw Kyaw Win replied that **officials from the Immigration Ministry have been issued instructions to process the documents smoothly and that the public could lodge complaints with the Ministry's Head Office in Naypyitaw.**⁸

The 8th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 6th day meeting on 9 October. Daw Tin Nwe Oo of Dagon Myothit (North) Constituency submitted the proposal urging the Union government to put the **Buddhist Women's Special Marriage and Succession Act 1954 into the curriculum** of high schools. Deputy Minister Dr Zaw Min Aung replied that **as the proposal may be designed to discriminate the religions recognized by the State and others, it should be considered on a wider scale. The session decided to put the proposal on record.**⁹

The 8th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 7th day meeting on 10 October. MP U Thein Lwin of Chauk Constituency raised **questions on the works being implemented by the government and the respective concerned ministries in the energy sector and asked if initiatives are being taken to inform the public.** The Union Minister Zeyar Aung, replied that **Burma's energy sector comprises of oil and gas, electricity, coal, solar wind, small hydropower, bio-fuel, bio-gas, geothermal energy and nuclear power,** and that the National Energy Management and Energy Development Committees were formed on 9 January 2013 for energy sector development in Burma. Sector-wise tasks are being undertaking to assist in drawing national energy policy and laws and rules by forming energy working committees, he added. With regard to the second question, he said that the ministry has been carrying out the tasks for exploration of oil and gas and exploration through unconventional methods in the oilfields to be able to fulfil oil and gas

⁶ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker attends 129th IPU assembly – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-09-red.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2013 (p. 8) / Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann attends second day meeting of 129th IPU Assembly – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 7) / Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker attends closing of 129th IPU Assembly – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 7)

⁷ Pyithu Hluttaw eighth regular session continues – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

⁸ Consumers to get more effective protection after enactment of Consumer Protection Law – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-09-red.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

⁹ SATs (probation) can attend B.Ed course without entrance exam – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 16)

requirements and that plans are underway to cooperate with internationally experienced companies for exploration and production of oil and gas in some onshore and offshore blocks by inviting international tenders. The ministry has been generating 3614.9 megawatts from 20 hydropower plants, 10 gas power plants and one coal-fired power plant. **In the mining sector**, the Ministry of Mines is promoting the role of the private sector to effectively implement tasks, he said. He added that the Ministry of Industry is striving for the emergence of Energy Efficiency and Conservation Law, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation is generating small-scale hydropower through canals of irrigation projects, and the Ministry of Energy has formed an information team to inform the public. The questions relating to the ministry sent to Public Service Capacity Assessment Committee are replied to in real time, he added.¹⁰

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 8th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 4th day meeting on 7 October. U Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency No (7) asked if there the federal and region/state governments were implementing farmland and land grab issues effectively and the actions being taken against offenders. Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation U Ohn Than said that relevant **farmland management committees led by the chairman of the Nay Pyi Taw Council and region/state chief ministers are to strictly exercise the provisions of the farmland law and bylaws and region/state governments are implementing the tasks in line with the law. In order to ensure food sufficiency in the country and contain the decrease in the number of farmlands that is being used for other purpose. Farmland management committees in various levels are urged to take serious actions against the illegal use of farmlands for other purposes. Directives had been sent to the Nay Pyi Taw Council and region/state governments by the Union government to make field trips to collect accurate data and to take punitive actions against the illegal use of farmlands for other purposes.**¹¹

The 8th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 6th day meeting on 9 October. Dr Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No. 8 submitted a proposal **to review the rights of labour and to draw the labour law;** and U Thein Win of Sagaing Region constituency No. 9 **urged the Union Government to take measures against the findings of the Public Accounts Committee of Amyotha Hluttaw regarding the construction works Nattalin Township, Bago Region.**¹²

The 8th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 7th day meeting on 10 October. U Nu of Yangon Region Constituency No (10) Constituency, raised the question regarding the orders issued in prohibiting basic education teachers from giving private tuitions Deputy Minister for Education U San Lwin said that relevant steps had already been taken to tackle the issue by the Ministry and that punitive actions ranging from warnings to terminating contracts had been put in place to those who violated the orders. He added that supplementary classes are being provided free to students for ensuring improvement of their academic performance. Currently, the process of conducting Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) is taking place and future plans based on the findings will be submitted to the government and the parliament.¹³

¹⁰ Seventh day session of Pyithu Hluttaw Continues –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

¹¹ Directives given to take punitive actions against illegal use of farmlands for other purposes –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-08-red.pdf> (NLM) 8 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

¹² Amyotha Hluttaw agrees to discuss engineering & technological education system –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2013 (p. 16)

¹³ Actions alone cannot eliminate private tuitions of teachers: Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 16 & 9)

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

90% OF KAREN WANT CONSTITUTION CHANGED: SURVEY

Over 90 percent of locals in the Karen state capital Hpa-an want the current 2008 constitution to be amended, according to a new survey conducted by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Karen state chairperson of NLD Nan Khine Htwe Myint, said that of 400 people interviewed across three townships in Hpa-an district on 6 October, the vast majority wanted to see the military's role in politics significantly reduced. She said respondents specifically wanted to change clauses that guarantee the armed forces 25 percent of seats in parliament and that preclude opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency on the basis of her foreign familial connections. But she added that most people believed it would be more realistic to amend rather than completely rewrite the document. "About 95 percent of them, including members from other political parties, see that the constitution should be amended."

The survey was conducted in Hpa-an, Hlaingbwe and Thandaung towns as part of the opposition party's plans to gauge public opinion on constitutional change. The NLD survey is being carried out in tandem with a state-backed effort to review the constitution. Earlier in October, the government formed a committee to review proposals for constitutional amendments, setting a 15 November deadline to receive feedback and recommendations. According to the NLD, survey respondents included influential local figures, teachers, pensioners, and members and parliament representatives from other political parties. Nan Khin Htwe Myint added that the party is looking to conduct similar surveys in other Karen state districts before 15 November. Meanwhile, Shan state's NLD chairperson Khin Moe Moe said the party is also looking to conduct surveys in 13 districts in northern, southern and eastern Shan state, starting with Muse district on 10 October.¹⁴

KNU CALLS FOR CODE OF CONDUCT PRIOR TO SIGNING OF NATIONWIDE PEACE ACCORD

The Vice-Chair of the Karen National Union (KNU), Zipporah Sein has raised her concerns that the government is rushing to sign a nation-wide cease-fire without taking into consideration the realities of ongoing armed conflict in ethnic areas or of failing to complete its obligations agreed to in previous peace talk meetings. She also urged that a code-of-conduct for troops from both sides during the ceasefire period has to be signed before the peace talks can move to the next stage. A nationwide ceasefire is not possible while there is still ongoing conflict and displacement in ethnic states, she added. In addition, she stressed that "the situation is not yet conducive for a nationwide ceasefire agreement. A nationwide ceasefire, we need to think about it carefully. This is one of the demands that we – the KNU and other ethnic nationalities made to the government previously. We asked the government that it should announce a cessation of all military offensives against ethnic resistance forces in the whole country. But, instead, they are now asking us to sign another agreement at what they call 'the Naypyidaw level' – this is after we signed a state level ceasefire agreement." She pointed out that it was crucial that the peace talks needs to keep to and work to a strict agenda. "We need to follow through what we agreed on before we can meaningfully move forward to the next step."

In January 2012 a KNU delegation led by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) chief of staff, General Mutu Sae Poe (who is now the KNU's chairperson) met with a government delegation in Hpa-an as part of the on-going peace talks process. The KNU delegation tabled 11 key points for discussion with their Burmese counterparts at the meeting.

¹⁴ Ninety percent of Karen locals want constitution changed: survey – <http://english.dvb.no/news/ninety-percent-of-karen-locals-want-constitution-changed-survey-burma-myanmar/33292>
(DVB) 10 October 2013

The 11 points submitted by the KNU included: a demand for the government to stop military operations in ethnic areas, the start a nationwide ceasefire as soon as possible, the guarantee of the human rights and safety of civilians, to build trust, to plan development projects that have the full participation and decision making of local villagers, to immediately stop forced labour and to stop excessive taxation and extortion of villagers.¹⁵

ANALYSIS

Burma's assumption of the Chairmanship of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) could not have come at a more crucial juncture in time. Since it became a member in 1997, Burma has been the focus of attention of the regional group for its failures in addressing human rights violations, staged sham elections in 2010 and the continued detention of political prisoners. In taking the Chair of ASEAN, Burma will once again become the centre of attention, not only in handling the long-list of meetings, but it will also be closely scrutinized on the manner in which it addresses the on-going democratic reforms as well as undertaking its international responsibilities.

Since taking office, President Thein Sein has introduced political and economic reforms as well as implementing a peace-process in ending decades of fighting between the government and ethnic armed groups. While progress has been made in some, one area which has failed to make progress and remains a major concern is the continued outbreaks of unrest between Buddhists and Muslim communities in some regions and states. The government has thus far failed to prevent sectarian clashes between Buddhists and Muslims and this will no doubt become a key area of interest for certain ASEAN member states. Burma will indeed be pressured to resolve the violence between the communities during its tenure of its Chairmanship. At first glance, the unrest have taken the nature of a conflict between Muslims and Buddhists, but they should be rather seen as a constitutional and human rights issue.

Burma has its work cut out as it strives to regain its place among the international community. The ASEAN Charter commits its members (including Burma) "to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law and to promote human rights and fundamental freedom". To that end, assuming the function of the ASEAN Chair is the beginning in the realisation of the provisions of the Charter for Burma, its leaders now have the chance to show and prove to the world that the current democratic reforms are genuine and, more importantly, irreversible. ASEAN and the international community should encourage the Burmese authorities to continue to move in the right direction and provide assistance to ensure a smooth transition.

¹⁵ KNU Leader – Govt's Labels Nationwide Ceasefire 'untimely' – <http://karennews.org/2013/10/knu-leader-govts-labels-nationwide-ceasefire-untimely.html/> (Karen News) 7 October 2013/
KNU Leader – Code of Conduct Urgently Needed – <http://karennews.org/2013/10/knu-leader-code-of-conduct-urgently-needed.html/> (Karen News) 7 October 2013 /
KNU Leader – Govt' Must Deliver On Its Agreements – <http://karennews.org/2013/10/knu-leader-govt-must-deliver-on-its-agreements.html/> (Karen News) 7 October 2013

APPENICES

Appendix A: FULL TEXT OF PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND KIO

The following is the full text of the agreement signed between Union Peace-making Work Committee and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) on 10 October 2013.

1. The government peace negotiation team led by Vice-Chairman of Union Peace-making Work Committee Union Minister U Aung Min and KIO peace delegation headed by U Sumlut Gam held peace talks at Majwe Hall in Manaw Ground in Myitkyina, Kachin State from 8 to 10 October. Present at the peace talks as observers were Special Adviser to UNSG on Myanmar Mr Vijay Nambiar, Chinese Special Envoy on Asia Mr Wang Ying Fan, representatives from 10 ethnic armed groups, four Kachin Hluttaw representatives, representatives from official political parties in Kachin State such as Union Solidarity and Development Party, National League for Democracy, Unity and Democracy Party, National Democratic Force, Tailai (Shanni) National Development Party and Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, Kachin National Traditional Culture Central Committee and Kachin State Shan Ethnic Literature and Culture Committee, members of Peace-talk Creation Group and ten invited community elders.
2. The two sides agreed the following points in front of the observers with a view to laying down sound foundation for political dialogue for lasting peace.
The seven-point agreement is as follows –
 - (a) The two sides agreed to continue according to the following preliminary procedure as the government has invited KIO to join nationwide ceasefire signing to enter into political dialogue.
 - (1) The Union government shall send and discuss the plans
 - (2) The government agreed to hold Ethnic Armed Groups Conference as demanded by KIO delegation
 - (b) The two sides acknowledged the de-escalation of the conflict since May 28-30 talks and attributed it to regular interaction between the technical teams and enhanced communication between troops from both sides and agreed to continue coordinating to avoid recurrence of clashes;
 - (c) The two sides agreed that the technical teams of two sides and departments concerned shall continue coordinating on adopting of basic principles and a plan for return and resettlement of IDPs; the two sides also agreed to undertake in coordination with each other the pilot project in four villages;
 - (d) The two sides agreed to form Joint Monitoring Committee based on an organizational structure that can cover all conflict regions to de-escalate the military tensions and avoid recurrence of clashes; the technical teams of two sides shall take further actions to adopt operational plan based on Joint Monitoring Committee Structure (Attached-1) and terms of reference— five basic principles and 18 rules (Attachment- 2);
 - (e) The two sides agreed to reopen through coordination as quickly as possible the public and arterial roads in Kachin State closed because of conflict;
 - (f) KIO agreed to organize public consultation through prior coordination with authorities concerned;
 - (g) The two sides agree that the technical teams shall coordinate on future work programmes and coordinate on soonest holding of next peace talks.¹⁶

¹⁶ UPWC, KIO sign new Agreement –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-10-11-red.pdf> (NLM) 11 October 2013 (p. 1 & 7)