

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.28

OFFICIAL MEDIA

MYANMAR CONCLUDES ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP

Myanmar's role as Chair of the 10-member regional grouping successfully concluded after it hosted the 25th ASEAN Summit and related meetings in Naypyitaw from 12 to 13 November.

During the 25th ASEAN Summit, the leaders from the 10-member regional bloc reviewed the progress for establishing the ASEAN Economic Community and measures to accelerate the implementation of the AEC roadmap and the strengthening of the community. They also agreed on promotion of the role of ASEAN and engaging more deeply with the dialogue partners through ASEAN plus One Summits, ASEAN plus Three Summits, East Asia Summits, ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meetings. The summit, also adopted the declaration of the ASEAN Chair, the Naypyitaw Framework and the Declaration on Strengthening of ASEAN Secretariat and reviewing of ASEAN Organs.

At the meetings that followed the Summit, ASEAN, its dialogue partners and East Asian leaders had opportunities to discuss future tasks and matters of strategic importance including cooperation in financial, energy, education, health and prevention of epidemics, natural disaster management, terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria and issues related to terrorist acts. At the closing ceremony on 13 November, Myanmar President Sein handed over the position of ASEAN chair for 2015 to Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak.¹

PRESIDENT OBAMA MEETS MYANMAR LEADERS

US President Obama held bilateral talks with President Thein Sein in Naypyitaw on 13 November and discussed the progress and challenges of democratic reforms in Myanmar, successful holding of free and fair elections in 2015 elections, constitutional reforms, stability and development of Rakhine State, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as well as cooperation with the UN on economic reform measures and recruitment of child soldiers. President Obama also held meetings with Myanmar parliamentarians including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and also met ASEAN youth leaders at the Diamond Jubilee Hall of Yangon University.

The US President also attended the 2nd ASEAN-U.S. Summit held in Naypyitaw and discussed strengthening efforts for the realization of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-U.S. Enhanced Partnership for Enduring Peace and Prosperity (2011-2015). In addition, the leaders

¹ President attends Plenary Meeting of 25th ASEAN Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 4)/
President U Thein Sein makes speech at Press Conference on ASEAN Summit and Related Summits – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 6)/
President U Thein Sein attends 17th ASEAN plus Three Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 3)/
President U Thein Sein attends 17th ASEAN-China Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 2)/
President U Thein Sein attends 12th ASEAN-India Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 3)/
President attends 17th ASEAN-Japan Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 4)/
Heads of State/Government of Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, ROK, China and US arrive in Naypyitaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 4)/
ASEAN leaders discuss regional and global issues at summit in Naypyitaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 1& 2)/
President joins commemorative summit of 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Australia Dialogue Relations – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 2)/

attending the 2nd US-ASEAN Summit reiterated their commitment to continue working together for peace, security and stability in the region, including the South China Sea, where territorial disputes between some ASEAN members and China have escalated in recent years. In this respect, they agreed to work for the early signing of all nuclear-weapon states to the protocol of the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, the ASEAN treaty that declares Southeast Asia as a nuclear weapon free zone. ASEAN leaders and President Obama also discussed the successful implementation of the Expanded Economic Engagement initiative, a new framework for economic cooperation designed to expand trade and investment ties between the United States and ASEAN, creating new business opportunities and jobs in all 11 countries.²

UN SECRETARY GENERAL MEETS MYANMAR PRESIDENT

President Thein Sein received the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 13 November and exchanged views on the democratic reforms in Myanmar, the on-going peace process and restoration of stability and development in Rakhine State as well as promotion of human rights in the country.

The UN Secretary-General also attended the 6th ASEAN-UN Summit in Naypyitaw and discussed settling of disputes peacefully in line with international law, enhancing ASEAN-UN cooperation by promoting and protecting human rights, cooperation in environmental preservation, climate change and disaster management as well as in tackling the emerging threat of the Ebola virus and the threat of extremism and fundamentalism particularly, extremist Islamic State groups in Iraq and Syria.

Ban also said that he was satisfied with the reform process of Myanmar and that further steps would still be needed. He also urged Myanmar to accelerate humanitarian tasks in Rakhine State, placing emphasis on protection of minority rights there and advised the government to continue cooperation with international organizations in humanitarian tasks in Rakhine State.³

THEIN SEIN MEETS CHINESE PREMIER

The Chinese Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang held talks with President Thein Sein on 15 November and discussed infrastructure and rural development projects in Myanmar including the Kyaukpadaung Special Economic Zone, China's proposal to implement the 21st century Maritime Silk Road, rural development as well as poverty alleviation. The two leaders also attended the signing of MOUs on promotion and development of energy, mining, agriculture and fisheries sectors in Myanmar and included the MoU on Bilateral Economic and Technological Cooperation under the Framework of BCIM Economic Corridor; the MoU on Projects Cooperation of the First Tranche Facility Agreement under the RMB 30 Billion Credit Facility and the MOU on Microfinance Facility Agreement for Poverty Reduction and Rural Development totalling US\$ Dollar 300 million. While attending the 9th East Asia Summit and the 17th ASEAN-China Summit held in Naypyitaw, Premier Li

² Myanmar, US presidents discuss democratic reform and regional issues –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 6)/
U.S. President meets Myanmar parliamentarians –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 5)/
2nd ASEAN-U.S. summit held in Naypyitaw –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 1 & 4)/
US President visits historic birthplace of Myanmar's independence –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 November 2014 (p. 1)

³ Myanmar President, UN Secretary-General discuss human rights –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 2)/
UNSG satisfied with reform process of Myanmar –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 8)/
ASEAN, UN discuss maintaining peace, sustainable development –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 November 2014 (p. 2)

also pledged to establish a US\$20 billion special loan for development of infrastructure in the ASEAN region.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 27th day meeting on 10 November and discussed the following issues and questions.

- MP Daw Tin Nwe Oo from Dagon Myothit (North) Constituency asked if **the Union Government had set aside reserve funds for natural disasters**. Deputy Minister for Finance Dr Lin Aung said that **the Union government has set aside a budget of K 100 billion each year for rescue and resettlement efforts in natural disasters since the 2012-13 fiscal year**. He added that **the union government is responsible for the reserve funds and will seek the approval of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on the spending of the funds at the next Hluttaw session**. The Deputy Minister also added that **the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement has plans to propose budgets for natural disasters including extreme weather condition, floods, earthquakes and fire accidents every year**.⁵

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 25th day meeting on 13 November and the progress report on the implementation of constitutional reform was debated at the session.

- MP Thura U Aye Myint of the Wetlet constituency suggested **laws contrary to contemporary political and social settings be modified as necessary at the right time in the right way, stressing that no law can stand against the time**. MP Daw Khin San Hlaing of the Pale constituency said that **greater autonomy to governments at State/Region levels will help the democratic system thrive, adding that it will lay a foundation for the federal system as desired by the public**. MP Sai San Min of the Shan State constituency-3 said that **the 2008 Constitution has given birth to multiparty democracy and put the country on the track of market economy, but for reforms to be successful amendments should be focused on existing laws**. MP Ba Shein of the Kyaukphyu constituency pointed out **the importance of the participation of defence services representatives in successful constitutional change, suggesting a nationwide referendum for amendments concerning section 436(a)**. Any constitutional change requires a support of over 75% of all members of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, while military appointees hold 25% of the seats in parliament. MP Zone Teint of the Chephwe constituency called for a constitution that serves national interests. The report has drawn submissions from 146 parliamentarians and the debate is scheduled to conclude on 25 November.⁶

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 26th day meeting on 14 November and session discussed the emergency motion regarding the usage of the term “Rohingya”.

- MP Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Township Constituency submitted the **motion calling on the session to object to the use of the term “Rohingya” used by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon at a press conference held at Myanmar International Convention Centre in**

⁴ President U Thein Sein, Chinese Premier Li hold talks at Presidential Palace –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 November 2014 (p. 1 &3)

⁵ Union government sets aside K 100 billion annually for natural disasters –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-11-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 November 2014 (p. 2)

⁶ Constitutional reform issues come under discussion at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-14-red.pdf> (GNLM) 14 November 2014 (p. 5)

Naypyitaw on 12 November as it interfered on Myanmar's sovereignty. The motion was seconded by MP Daw Khin Saw Wai of Yathedaung Township Constituency. MP Thein Nyunt explained that **under international law, all should respect the law of a host country and the UN Secretary-General should not have used the word "Rohingya," as the people it refers to have never existed officially in Myanmar and are not Myanmar citizens, adding that this might harm the stability of the democratic transition.** Daw Khin Saw Wai also said that **the use of the word hampers the stability between the Rakhine nationals and the Bengalis, explaining that there is no such race as "Rohingya" in Myanmar.** The motion was unanimously approved by the session.⁷

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NCCT, UPWC LEADERS HELD INFORMAL TALKS

The Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), led by Nai Hongsar, conducted an informal meeting with the Union Peace-Making Working Committee (UPWC) on 10 November Monday in Naypyitaw.

Senior Advisor of the Myanmar Peace Centre Hla Maung Shwe said that, both sides exchanged views on how best to carry out points which were left unresolved from the last round of talks held in September. They agreed to schedule another round of talks at the end of the month, and hoped that they could reach some decisions during this upcoming talk. "The outcome from this talk is the emergence of truth. Both sides now understand how to approach one another. As it is an informal talk, it's open and both sides get to address their points," said Hla Maung Shwe.

According to NCCT leader Nai Hongsar, while talks have stopped for a while because of some difficulties, the NCCT has now found a way to engage in informal meetings with the UPWC. The NCCT has travelled to meet the UPWC in Naypyitaw to discuss both side's points and perspectives. He added that the informal meeting was held to find a way for re-starting nationwide ceasefire talks. Official talks will take place at the end of this month, but the specific date has not been scheduled yet. We, the NCCT, also need to have a meeting first. Whether the talks can be finalized during the next round of talks, will depend on the UPWC, and its willingness to change," said Nai Hongsar. The 6th round of talks between the NCCT and the UPWC was held in September and that meeting scheduled to take place in October was postponed.⁸

MILITIA FORCES INVOLVED IN ATTACKS AGAINST SSPP/SSA

In their operations which took place between 2nd and 30th October against the SSPP/SSA bases in Hsipaw, Mongyai and Ke See, the Burma Army used at least 1,000 People's Militia forces based in northern and southern Shan State. A local militia officer quoted that, "the local People's Militia from the south had to send 50 troops to Keng Tong for military training. The People's Militia from the north had to go to Man Kat, at Tangyan Township for training. The training was related to how to seize bases, and after their training they were sent to the front line."

Over 10 battalions under the Burma Army's Central Eastern Command in Kholam and People's Militias forces carried out attacks targeting the bases of SSPP/SSA in Ta Pha Saung, Kong Mark Hin Tarn, Kong Sao Merng, Kong Mung Merng, Kong Mike Nyaung, and Nam Put.

The SSPP/SSA has been conducting ambushes against the Burma Army and People's Militia troops that pass through the townships of Mongyai, Hsipaw, Ke See, and Murg Nong as counter-attacks in response to the Burma Army offensive operations. The fighting caused injuries and deaths on both

⁷ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw raises objection to UNSG's use of "Rohingya – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 November 2014 (p. 2)

⁸ NCCT, UPWC leaders held informal talk – <http://monnews.org/2014/11/13/ncct-upwc-leaders-held-informal-talk/> (IMNA) 13 November 2014

sides, and four civilians were also killed. The SSPP/SSA has also lost its bases in Ta Pha Saung and Kong Mung Merng to the Burma Army.

Though a union level ceasefire agreement between the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army and the Naypyitaw government was signed in January, 2012, the fighting continues. With the aim of preventing further outbreaks of fighting leaders from both sides have been trying to form a joint committee to oversee peace and development but have not been able to do so.

The People's Militia are armed groups under the control of the Burma Army. There are hundreds of government People's Militia groups now operating in northern and Southern Shan State.⁹

WA DISCUSS REOPENING OF THAI-MYANMAR BORDER CHECKPOINT

The Shan Herald Agency News reported on 11 November that one of the topics discussed during the meeting held in Mongla between the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) was the reopening of a Thai-Myanmar border checkpoint that has been closed since 2002. The Kiu Pha Wawk, Boundary Pillar Number 1 checkpoint that connects Mongton Township, Shan State with Thailand's Chiangdao District was shut down by the Tatmadaw in June 2002 following a month long military confrontation with the Shan State Army. The UWSA's Vice President Xiao Minliang also proposed 6 other agenda items including – the assistance for road construction; license for 60 Wa trucks; national identification for the Wa people; the hydropower plant on the Salween; a coal mining project and the hydropower plant in Hsipaw. President of the National Democratic Alliance Army Sai Leun (a) Lin Mingxian, also requested for assistance to schools and hospitals in NDAA territory.¹⁰

KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY CALLED ON TO FREE FORCED SHAN CONSCRIPTS

About 200 Shan people alleged to have been forcibly recruited into the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) still need to be freed, according to Chairman of the Northern Burma Committee of the Shan Nationalities Affairs Sai Tun Yin based in Kachin State. "We have already met with officers from the KIA Technical Advisory Team from Myitkyina Township and when we proposed that they release them [the forcibly recruited Shan]. They said they would look into it but that it may be difficult as they are all in different battalions," he said. Of the 280 Shan people who were conscripted by the KIA, since the start of armed clashes with the army in June 2011 and until September 2014, only 98 have escaped, according to Sai Tun Yin. "There have been no legal releases [of conscripts] but some find the opportunity to escape, some run away to China before returning to Myanmar," he said.

Spokesperson for the KIA Technical Advisory Team Dong Khar, said local that they are now dealing with complaints about conscriptions and he admitted that previously the KIA had conscripted child soldiers and collected tax from villagers. "We cannot yet confirm whether there are any [Shan conscripts]. When their people came and discussed this with us we made investigations," he said. "When there are frequent armed clashes all forces conscript people, even the government army conscript people," he added.

Shan people in Kachin State live mainly in an area bounded by Sin-Bo Village on the Ayeyarwaddy River in Myitkyina Township to the East and the townships of Mogaung and Moehnyin to the west. KIA and government forces are active in the area. A monk and leader of the Shan Volunteer and

⁹ About 1,000 militia forces involved in attacks against SSPP/SSA – http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5971:about-1000-militia-forces-involved-in-attacks-against-ssppssa&catid=86:war&Itemid=284 (SHAN) 10 November 2014

¹⁰ Wa discuss reopening of Thai-Myanmar border checkpoint – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/14656-wa-discuss-reopening-of-thai-myanmar-border-checkpoint> (Mizzima) 11 November 2014

Social Association U Wizaya, said: "It's undeniable, the Shan people are trapped in an area where the two sides clash."

The Head of the KIO Foreign Affairs Department Lt. Col. James Lumdau, denied that they were forcibly recruiting Shan people. The KIO has no policy to forcibly recruit soldiers and if anyone sees KIO forces on the ground conscripting people they can complain and effective action will be taken, said a leading KIO leader who asked to remain anonymous.

The Northern Burma Committee of the Shan Nationalities Affairs estimates that about 500,000 Shan people live in Kachin State. They claim that about 200,000 of the Shan in Kachin State were excluded from the national census as the population list drawn up by the government prior to the census only showed a Shan population of 300,000 people in the State.¹¹

ANALYSIS

Against the backdrop of criticism and pressure, Myanmar has successfully steered and guided the 10-member ASEAN Chairmanship to a successful conclusion. It has demonstrated to the international community its willingness and commitment towards the on-going reform process.

Despite the positive progress and successful holding of the ASEAN Summit lie the real tests for Naypyitaw in resolving issues ranging from ethnic conflicts, constitutional reform, land rights, sectarian violence and national reconciliation. The issues are inter-related and complex and will need to be dealt with collectively and failure to do so could see a knock-on effect on the country's reform process.

Urgent action is needed to address the issues and Naypyitaw needs to show that the progress achieved thus far is not mere window-dressing. The international community on its part should continue in providing support towards the on-going reform process and play a vital part in the transformation of the country from a closed authoritarian to a more open and democratic society. Similarly, it is crucial for key stakeholders including parliamentarians, political parties, ethnic armed organisations and civil society to work together in bringing about change to the country. The road ahead for Myanmar is long, challenges remain and new ones will emerge and the transition to democracy will require patience and time.

¹¹ Kachin Independence Army called on to free forced Shan conscripts – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/14654-kachin-independence-army-called-on-to-free-forced-shan-conscripts> (Mizzima) 11 November 2014