

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.39

OFFICIAL MEDIA

AMNESTY GRANTED TO 69 PRISONERS

Aiming at placing emphasis on humanitarian grounds and encouraging them to make their contributions to the nation-building endeavours after realizing the magnanimity of the State, President Thein granted announced an amnesty for 69 prisoners on 15 November in accordance with Section 204 (a) of the Constitution and Section 401, Subsection (i) of Code of Criminal Procedure. Sixty-nine prisoners from Insein, Mandalay, Myingyan, Thayawady, Toungoo, Shwebo, Monywa, Pathein, Thaton, Ingapu, Bhamo, Myitkyina, Hsipaw, Kengtung, Kyaukpyu, Thandwe, Buthidaung and Sittway were released under the amnesty. The committee for scrutinizing political prisoners will continue to work for all political prisoners to be granted amnesty before the end of December 2013.¹

MONGOLIAN PRESIDENT PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO BURMA

Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj arrived in Naypyitaw on 18 November to start his official visit to the country. It first time that a Mongolian Head of State had visited Burma since diplomatic ties were established between the two countries in 1956. Mongolian President called on Burmese President Thein Sein on 18 November and discussed promotion of bilateral relations between the two nations, cooperation in regional and international arenas and tourism and mining sectors, exchanges of high-ranking officials, further strengthening relations between the two peoples and ASEAN-Mongolia relations. The two leaders also witnessed the signing of an agreement on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic and special passports. President Elbegdorj held talks with senior government officials and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and exchanged views on further strengthening of friendly relations and cooperation between parliaments between the two countries and addressed the Myanmar-Mongolian Business Forum in Yangon on 20 November. In a Joint Statement issued at the end of the visit, both sides expressed their interest to expand mutually beneficial cooperation in the fields of trade, mining, tourism, culture and economic sectors and agreed to promote the exchange of visits and cooperation between the two countries. (*Please see Appendix A for full text of the joint statement*).²

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RECEIVES FORMER BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR

President Thein Sein received a delegation led by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on 16 November in Naypyitaw and discussed inflow of foreign investment for development of socio-

¹ Amnesty Granted –

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

² Mongolian President and party arrive in Nay Pyi Taw –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 November 2013 (p.16) /

President U Thein Sein rolls out red carpet to welcome Mongolian President –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-19-red.pdf> (NLM) 19 November 2013 (p.1) /

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets Mongolian President –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-20-red.pdf> (NLM) 20 November 2013 (p. 8) /

Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker meets Mongolian President and party –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-20-red.pdf> (NLM) 20 November 2013 (p. 9) /

Chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquillity Committee meets Mongolian President –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-20-red.pdf> (NLM) 20 November 2013 (p. 9) /

Myanmar-Mongolia Business Forum and Business Networking held –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-21-red.pdf> (NLM) 21 November 2013 (p. 1) /

Mongolia's willingness to support and assist Myanmar's wide-ranging aspirations in the field of democratization, rule of law and protection of human rights –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-21-red.pdf> (NLM) 21 November 2013 (p. 6)

economy of the people, job opportunities, development of tourism industry and energy sectors as well as providing electricity to rural areas. Blair also met Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and exchanged views on bilateral ties and cooperation between the two countries. He also attended a meeting with political parties and religious organizations at Myanmar Peace Centre on 16 November. In his address Blair highlighted the need in building trust between different faiths in Burma in achieving harmony and called on those involved in the on-going peace process could take time but still achievable.³

COMMITTEE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF INVESTIGATION COMMISSION'S REPORT ON COPPER MINING PROJECT MEETS

A work coordination meeting of the Committee for Implementation of the Report of the Investigation Commission on Latpadaungtaung Copper Mining Project was held in 20 November at the President's Office. The Union Minister and Committee Chair Hla Tun, called on authorities concerned to ensure greater transparency in tackling the matters related to compensations for land grabs, environmental conservation and implementation of tasks for socio-economic development of local people. Other members of the Commissions gave updates regarding the strict adherence to corporate social responsibility; as well as security measures and works being carried by the investigation commission. In his concluding address, Hla Tun said that a liaison office is being kept open for local people to present their grievances, peaceful protests have been allowed in accordance with the law and negotiations and relaxations are undertaken in accordance with rules and regulations. He called for collaborative efforts of the committee members to implement the tasks in accord with the laws serving the interest of the people and ensuring the rule of law and peace and stability and rules and regulations.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Upper House)

The 8th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 13th day meeting on 15 November. During the session:

- Regarding **the question on acquiring foreign loans**, U Zaw Myint Pe, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Bill Committee, stated that **relevant ministries are to place emphasis on loans from abroad for long-term interest of the nation and to agree borrowing of US\$ 115.874 million loan from the Republic of Korea**. He also added that although **there was no objection for the loans, though it needs to review significant points of the foreign loans in question**.
- Pyithu Hluttaw Projects and Financial Committee member U Aye Mauk discussed matters **related to loan and sought the approval of the Hluttaw**.⁵

³ President U Thein Sein receives former British Prime Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 November 2013 (p. 1) / Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives former British PM – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 November 2013 (p. 9) / Peace building among different faiths difficult but possible; Former British PM Tony Blair – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 November 2013 (p. 16)

⁴ Committee for implementation of investigation commission's report meets – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-21-red.pdf> (NLM) 21 November 2013 (p. 8)

⁵ Taking foreign loans to help develop the nation in long run – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-16-red.pdf> (NLM) 16 November 2013 (p. 16)

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

GOVT TROOPS CONTINUE TO CLASH WITH KIA IN SOUTHERN KACHIN

Fighting between the Burma Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) continued in southern Kachin State's Mansi Township, where fresh clashes displaced about 2,000 villagers, according to Kachin aid groups.

On 16 November, government troops fought with KIA fighters near the village of Nam Lim Pa, causing ethnic Kachin villagers to flee into the surrounding forest, said Naw Din, the manager of the Karuna Myanmar Social Service Relief Team based in Bhamo. Many of displaced walked for a day and a night to reach the nearby village of Maw Win Gyi, the aid worker said, adding that more Kachin villagers continued to arrive on 18 November. He said local aid organizations struggled to take care of the growing number of displaced villagers, adding that an estimated 2,000 people had fled from Nam Lim Pa village over the weekend. Many of them had previously fled other villages and sought refuge in Nam Lim Pa, but this village had now become too dangerous, Naw Din explained.

Maran Seng Aung said the fighting had disrupted the lives of thousands of Kachin villagers and could derail ceasefire talks between the KIA and Naypyidaw, while also undermining government efforts to sign a nationwide ceasefire with 17 ethnic armed groups. "This fighting could cause damage to the peace process. They need to build more trust and should stop fighting," he said, adding that he hoped upcoming peace talks would put an end to the fighting in Mansi.⁶

KIA ORDERS TROOPS NOT TO RESPOND AFTER BURMA ARMY CAPTURES IDP CAMP

Senior officials at the Kachin Independence Army's (KIA) Laiza headquarters issued instructions on 19 November ordering troops in the field not to respond the Burmese army's military attacks to recapture the Nam Lim Pa IDP camp in southern Kachin State. These orders are likely directly related to the visit to Yangon by the Vice Chief of Staff of KIA, Maj-Gen Sumlut Gun Maw, according to Major Labang Jawn Awng, a commander with KIA Battalion 12.

Located in territory held by the KIA's Battalion 12, Nam Lim Pa was home to more than 2,000 IDP until it was captured by the Burmese Army. Jawn Awng and his colleagues accuse the army of taking advantage of an aid convoy to seize the camp. According to Jawn Awng, shortly after the aid convoy was allowed to proceed to the camp the military dispatched a large number of troops to seize the camp which put many civilians at risk.

Heavy fighting erupted in the vicinity of the camp shortly after it was captured and this fighting continued for three straight days, said Lahpai La Doi, a villager from Nam Lim Pa. The fighting largely stopped after KIA headquarters issued instruction ordering their troops on the ground not to attack the military, said the villager who fled the fighting.⁷

US AMBASSADOR MEETS SENIOR KIA OFFICIAL

Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) General Gwan Maw met the US Ambassador to Burma Derek Mitchell on 19 November at the US Embassy and explained the ongoing peace process. The Spokesperson for the KIO's Technical Advisory Team Daung Khar said, "We can confirm that Maj-Gen Gwan Maw met with the U.S. Ambassador. The discussion began at 8 a.m. and took about one hour. He [Gwan Maw] is aiming to see the enactment of the updated peace process. We were just providing a piece of information according to diplomatic rules and regulations."

⁶ Senior KIA Figure Visits Rangoon, Fresh Fighting In Kachin State – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/govt-troops-continue-clash-kia-southern-kachin.html> (Irrawaddy) 18 November 2013

⁷ KIA orders troops not to respond after Burma army captures IDP camp – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2597-kia-orders-troops-not-to-respond-after-burma-army-captures-idp-camp.html> (KNG) 20 November 2013

While in Yangon, Gwan Maw held a press conference on 18 November and gave an update on the current peace activities, the KIO's position on the resumption of the Myit Sone dam project and skirmishes between the government and the KIO. He also told the media that he hoped to hear the opinions of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on issues concerning ethnic affairs.⁸

SHAN PARTIES CONSIDER MERGER PROPOSAL

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) has proposed a merger with the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) also known as the White Tiger Party. In a letter dated 16 November, the SNLD invited the White Tiger Party to a meeting to discuss the proposed merger, citing public petitions over the past year as well as a call by the Shan State Joint Action Committee urging the two main Shan parties to form a coalition or an alliance in time for the 2015 general election.

Sai Nyunt Lwin, a spokesperson for the SNLD, said that although the two parties carry different policies, they should be able to resolve any differences through negotiations. "Our ambition is to structure a union based on eight administrative regions, as opposed to the SNDP which prefers a 14-region system. This is one area of disagreement among many," he said. "However, we will only achieve an outcome after negotiations." The SNLD spokesman said the party has formed a negotiation team of five representatives to discuss the merger.

Sai Hswang Hsi of the SNDP said he welcomed the SNLD's approach, and said that his party had discussed the possibility of an alliance at its annual congress earlier this year. He said that his party had formed a Committee to Implement the United Party of Shan State, in which he was appointed leader. "Inherently a merger shouldn't be too difficult but we can't tell at this stage how it would work in practice," said Sai Hswang Hsi. "According to Election Commission rules, both parties would have to be abolished in order to set up a new party which we would then have to register. "What happens if we form a new party and it does not get approved ahead of the 2015 elections?"⁹

ETHNIC MON PARTIES PLAN MERGER

The All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMRDP) and the Mon Democracy Party (MDP) have tentatively reached an agreement to merge, according to party officials. A special committee, in which both parties have equal representation, will convene on 22 November to hammer out the details of the proposed merger. According to MDP secretary Min Soe Lin (a) Min Soe Linn, the committee's 30 members will determine the new party's flag, objectives and how best to implement a framework for registration with the Union Election Commission via secret ballot. "All the monks and people of Mon state wish to see us as one party. It is also important to have many Mon representatives in the 2015 elections so that we will be able to self determine legislation, executive and judicial matters," Nai Ngwe Thein said. The two parties first began talks on merger discussions in early 2012.

The MNDP was officially abolished by military authorities after it won seats in the May 1990 national election. Following the ban many MNDP party officials, including Min Soe Lin, were sent to jail. The party was later allowed to re-register using the current name in preparation for the April 2012 round of by-elections. But although the MNDP participated it failed to win any seats.

⁸ Senior KIA officer meets U.S. Ambassador – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/4145-senior-kia-officer-meets-u-s-ambassador> (Eleven News Media) 20 November 2013

⁹ Shan parties consider merger proposal – <http://english.dvb.no/news/shan-parties-consider-merger-proposal-myanmar-burma/34536> (DVB) 19 November 2013

The AMRDP was established during the run-up to the November 2010 general elections; the party presently has 16 seats in the Mon State parliament.¹⁰

KNU OUTLINES PEACE PROCEDURES AT KUPC MEETING

The Karen Unity and Peace Committee (KUPC) held a meeting with the Karen National Union (KNU) outlining peace procedures in Insein Township, Yangon Region on 20 November. During the meeting, Min Zaw Oo of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) provided a progress update on the peace process and Col Saw Tu Tu Lay of the KNU discussed peace procedures and the timeframe for political dialogue. Karen organizations from the respective states and regions, including Karen State, also submitted reports on progress made regarding the peace process. The KUPC was formed with Kayin members of parliament, members of Kayin political parties, Kayin armed groups and members of Kayin organisations that agreed to the peace process in April this year and now has 52 members.¹¹

MON GROUP REJECTS GOVT CEASEFIRE PROPOSAL

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) has rejected a draft put forward by the Burmese government on a proposed nationwide ceasefire agreement, according to a party spokesman. Nai Hong Sar Bon Khine said that the NMSP opposed nearly half of the draft agreement's points. "We have many points of disagreement with their draft," he said. "Especially points such as requiring us to disarm, or allowing their police to have responsibility for law enforcement in areas under our control, these are unacceptable," Nai Hong Sar Bon Khine said.

The Burmese government handed the draft proposal to 17 ethnic armed groups at peace talks in Myitkyina, Kachin State, early in November. The coalition of ethnic groups in turn submitted its own draft for the government peace team's consideration. The government's 11-page document contains 25 points detailing Naypyidaw's vision of how to begin the process of achieving a lasting peace in Burma, which has been plagued by civil war for more than 60 years.

Leaders of the NMSP held a meeting at their headquarters in Ye Township, Mon State from 13-15 November to analyze the government's draft. At the meeting, Mon leaders agreed to remove points that they did not agree with and added new points that the group felt were necessary. Nai Hong Sar Bon Khine, who is also a NMSP central committee member, said his group's leaders suspected that the Burmese government wanted all ethnic armed groups to disarm, though this is not directly stated in the draft proposal. However, the NMSP's vice chairman, Naing Han Thar, declined to discuss in detail the provisions of the draft that are rejected by the party.¹²

CHIN NATIONAL CONFERENCE VOTES TO AMEND 2008 CONSTITUTION, SEEK FEDERAL SYSTEM

The Chin National Conference, held in Hakha, Chin State from 12 to 15 November ended with delegates voting to amend the 2008 Constitution and bring a genuine federal system to Burma, according to Salai Ngae Pee, Secretary of the Chin National Party.

¹⁰ Ethnic Mon parties plan merger – <http://english.dvb.no/news/ethnic-mon-parties-plan-merger-burma-myanmar/34499> (DVB) 18 November 2013

¹¹ KNU outlines peace procedures at KUPC meeting – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/4164-knu-outlines-peace-procedures-at-kupc-meeting> (Eleven News Media) 21 November 2013

¹² Mon group rejects 'unacceptable' Govt ceasefire proposal – http://www.irrawaddy.org/z_mon/mon-group-rejects-unacceptable-govt-ceasefire-proposal.html (Irrawaddy) 19 November 2013/

New Mon State Party rejects 'rigid' draft ceasefire agreement – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/politics/item/10604-new-mon-state-party-rejects-rigid-draft-ceasefire-agreement> (Mizzima) 19 November 2013

Salai Ngae Pee, who chaired the conference, said “the conference’s result is aimed at focusing on the Constitutional amendment to change into a genuine federal system. This result will be conveyed to the national-level political dialogue by delegates who will attend the Union-level conference. The Chin social network is drawing up its constitution. All Chin people have decided to amend the 2008 Constitution.”

The conference also released a 10-point statement on the establishment of genuine federal system. The statement said that a federal system must include sovereignty across the entire nation, 1) equity in politics, religion and race, 2) self-administration, 3) a federal-style Union, 4) the protection of ethnic minority privileges, 5) democratic rights, 6) human rights and gender equality, 7) a multi-party democratic system, 8) a country not based on religion, 9) the formation of a Union army, and 10) the right to establish a new state.¹³

ANALYSIS

The unhappiness and dissatisfaction towards the existing 2008 Constitution was once again reflected and echoed in the 10-point statement issued at the recent the Chin Conference in Hakha. The government has thus far failed to win over its critics and the recent postponement by the parliamentary panel to extend its deadline to deliver its report by 31 December will not have helped its cause. One of the reasons to postpone the deadline was to allow and incorporate additional proposals including those from ethnic armed groups involved peace talks with the government though many are of the feeling that this may not be the case. The current constitution has contentious clauses including the automatic election of 25 per cent of parliamentary seats to the military as well as barring of Burmese nationals whose relatives are foreign citizens or hold foreign citizenship from serving as President. Therefore, the constitutional review process could yet become not only another major challenge but also a pivotal step towards democratic transition. The government will therefore need to handle the issue with care since any debate or discussion defining the role of the military (Tatmadaw) in the country’s politics could proved to be counter-productive and jeopardize what is already a fragile reform process.

¹³ Chin National Conference votes to amend 2008 Constitution, seek federal system – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/4117-chin-national-conference-votes-to-amend-2008-constitution-seek-federal-system> (Eleven News Media) 18 November 2013

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Joint Statement between the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Mongolia

Mongolia's willingness to support and assist Myanmar's wide-ranging aspirations in the field of democratization, rule of law and protection of human rights

Nay Pyi Taw, 20 November 2013

The Joint Statement between the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Mongolia was issued as follows:

At the invitation of His Excellency U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, His Excellency Mr. Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, President of Mongolia paid a state visit to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar from 19th to 21st November, 2013.

The two Presidents held productive and in-depth discussions in a cordial and friendly atmosphere on Myanmar-Mongolia bilateral ties and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The two Presidents underlined that the first ever visit by a Head of State of Mongolia marked the opening of a new chapter in Myanmar-Mongolia relations and laid down solid foundation for further strengthening the traditionally friendly bilateral relationship and cooperation.

The Myanmar side commended Mongolia for its accomplishments in building a democratic society and private sector led free market economy, as well as its achievement in socio economic development. The President of Myanmar lauded Mongolia's Chairmanship of the Community of Democracies in 2011-2013 and the successful organization of the VII Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies in Ulaanbaatar.

The Mongolia side also commended Myanmar's continued efforts for political economic, administrative and private sector reforms and expressed confidence that sustainable growth, peaceful and prosperous future would be achieved. The President of Mongolia expressed Mongolia's willingness to support and assist Myanmar's wide-ranging aspirations in the field of democratization, rule of law and protection of human rights.

The Presidents noted the substantive role of a transparent governance, open society, free press, civil society and civil education in building democracy, protection human rights, promoting rule of law and agreed to exchange experiences and to foster cooperation between the two countries in these areas.

The Mongolia side expressed its readiness to use its International Cooperation Fund to support joint bilateral as well as multilateral activities and initiatives, to strengthen and advance democracy in the region and beyond.

The Mongolian side also congratulated Myanmar on its upcoming Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014, and expressed its hope that ASEAN-Mongolia cooperation, particularly in the framework of ASEAN Regional Forum "ARF", will be strengthening during Myanmar's Chairmanship.

Both sides expressed their interest to expand mutually beneficial cooperation in the fields of trade, mining, tourism, culture and economic sectors.

The Presidents underlined the importance of educational and cultural cooperation as an important foundation for bilateral contact, people-to-people ties, particularly amongst our young people.

The two Presidents agreed to promote the exchange of visits at all levels, particularly between heads of state, parliamentarians, government ministers and senior officials in order to identify potential areas of bilateral cooperation.

The two presidents highlighted the importance of cooperation and exchanged of experience between the two countries with common goals and shared values of strengthening democracy and promoting high levels of growth based on their respective advantages.

The Presidents shared a view on the need for democracies to share and learn from each other and exchanged experiences on further advancing democratic practices.

The two Presidents also reaffirmed the importance of active bilateral cooperation at the international and regional levels, in particular within the United Nations and ASEAN. In accordance with the consensus principle of ASEAN, Myanmar will consider Mongolia's interest to become a dialogue partner of ASEAN and to join the East Asia Summit.

The two Presidents witnessed the signing of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of Mongolia on the Exemption of Visa Requirements for holders of Diplomatic and Officials Passports, by His Excellency U Wunna Maung Lwin, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and His Excellency Mr. Luvsanvandan Bold, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

His Excellency President Mr. Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj extended an invitation to His Excellency President U Thein Sein to pay an official visit to Mongolia at a time of his convenience, and President U Thein Sin accepted the invitation with appreciation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Mongolia's willingness to support and assist Myanmar's wide-ranging aspirations in the field of democratization, rule of law and protection of human rights – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs16/NLM-2013-11-21-red.pdf> (NLM) 21 November 2013 (p. 6)