
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 13

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS ETHNIC LEADERS IN KENGTUNG

President Thein Sein held meetings on 8 May with ethnic leaders in Kentung aimed at restoring peace and promoting regional development. The president and party met with Deputy Chairman of UWSP/UWSA Pauk Yu Yi of Wa Special Region-2, Chairman of the RCSS/SSA Ywet Sit and Chairman of Mongla Special Regions-4 Sai Lin in separate meetings at the Golden Triangle Yeiktha in Kengtung. The three ethnic leaders expressed support for the peace process of the government and reiterated their commitment to signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement. President Thein Sein and party also visited a Catholic Missionary Church in Kengtung and greeted the Catholic Bishop of Kengtung Peter Lewis Kyakhu and also met local people at the City Hall.¹

SPEAKER THURA SHWE MANN PAYS GOODWILL VISIT TO U.S

Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann arrived in Washington D.C to begin his official visit to the United States on 30 April. The Myanmar parliamentary delegation were in the U.S. at the invitation of Speaker of the House of Representatives of the U.S. John Boehner. Speaker Thura Shwe Mann held separate meetings with US Senator Mitch McConnell and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific Congressman Matt Salmon on 30 April and discussed cooperation between the two parliaments and exchanging views on democratic reform.

On the same day, Thura Shwe Mann also met Minority Leader of the House of Representatives Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and member of the Democratic Party Congressman Joseph Crowley exchanged views on development of Myanmar's democratic reforms. Thura Shwe Mann and party also met business people at the headquarters of the US-ASEAN Business Council and also attended a seminar on Elections 2015 in Myanmar organised by the Carnegie Endowment headquarters in Washington DC on 1 May.

The Myanmar Speaker and party also visited New York and held meetings with the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Deputy National Security Adviser to the US President Benjamin J Rhodes and Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 5 April and exchanged views on human rights, democracy and peace processes in Myanmar.²

PEACE IN MYANMAR MUST PRECEDE FURTHER INVESTMENT, EU AMBASSADOR SAYS

Speaking at the press lunch to mark Europe Day 2015 in Yangon on 7 May, the EU Ambassador to Myanmar Roland Korbias said that the European Union wants to help Myanmar end conflicts and achieve peace as its first priority. He said, Europe Day highlights the principles of democracy and freedom which the EU wishes to share with Myanmar. The EU is one of the major foreign donors to

¹ President U Thein Sein meets ethnic leaders in Kengtung –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-09.pdf> (GNLM) 9 May 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

² Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann pays goodwill visit to U.S. (GNLM) 1 May 2015 (p. 3)/
Speaker of Pyidaungsu and Pyithu Hluttaw meets US senator –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-02.pdf> (GNLM) 2 May 2015 (p. 3)/
Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann meets US business people, congresspersons –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-03.pdf> (GNLM) 3 May 2015 (p. 3)/
Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann explains Myanmar's move for coming elections –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 May 2015 (p. 3)/
Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann leaves Washington D.C. for New York –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-06.pdf> (GNLM) 6 May 2015 (p. 3)/
Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann calls on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-07.pdf> (GNLM) 7 April 2015 (p. 3)

Myanmar, providing a US \$1.1 billion grant for the period of 2014-2020 to implement development projects in the country. "The great majority of the money will go to education and rural development," the EU ambassador said.

"The reason why we want to work on the peace process is because the EU is a (peace) promoter. "We want to help Myanmar in achieving peace." He said spending money on other areas is a waste until peace is achieved." If you don't have peace, if you have conflict and if you have war, all this money will be wasted because war is not a conducive environment to develop the country or to develop democracy," said Ambassador Korbia. He added by saying that the EU is going to help prepare for the Myanmar's upcoming elections in cooperation with other international organizations. In a vote of support for Myanmar's reform steps, the EU lifted sanctions and opened an office in the country in 2012 after which a full-fledged delegation was established with the arrival of its ambassador in 2013.³

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC LEADERS SUMMIT HELD IN PANGHSAN

Wa's demand for an independent state received support from some representatives of the ethnic armed forces during a summit in Panghsang in Shan State that concluded on 7 May with a 12-point agreement, a news release says. The United Wa State Party/ United Wa State Army (UWSA) hosted the summit in Panghsan, Shan State, which is home to its headquarters. The Chinese-speaking Wa Special Region 2 is located in Northern Shan State and has a population estimated at more than half a million.

The summit, which began 1 May, was attended by leaders from the 12 ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), which speaks for the EAOs in ceasefire talks. They discussed the country's current political situation and peace efforts, and the summit was held with the aim of evaluating the recently adopted nationwide ceasefire draft. Those in attendance at the summit came to an understanding that the ongoing conflicts that have plagued Myanmar for more than 6 decades are the result of political differences between the various ethnic groups and Myanmar's government and could only be resolved through political means.

However, for the conflicts to be resolved through political means would require a national ceasefire act that applies equally to ethnic armed forces still fighting the government, participants agreed. The draft nationwide ceasefire deal was negotiated by the Union Peacemaking Work Committee, which represents the government, and the NCCT, and was a key focus of the Panghsan conference.

The summit also declared that in order to achieve a ceasefire deal to end the battles in Northern Myanmar, the government should welcome the intervention of (international organisations and China. The summit also demanded the immediate end to the offensives led by the Myanmar military in Kachin, Taang, Kokang and Rakhine in Northern Myanmar. The participants condemned what it outlined as human rights violations and torture by the military of those living in the ethnic regions, particularly in armed conflict zones.

As well, the summit called for amendments to the 2008 constitution so democracy, racial equality and personal rights are incorporated into development of a solid federal union. Government committees are currently working on a constitutional amendment bill that will eventually go to Parliament.

Leaders of the various groups represented at the summit also called for regions where non-bamar ethnicities live to remain in the Union and co-exist with each other. Bamar make up the largest ethnic group in the country and is the language spoken. It was also agreed upon that a group representing all armed forces should be formed in order to engage in political discussions with the government. In

³ Peace in Myanmar must precede further investment, EU ambassador says –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-05-08.pdf> (GNLM) 8 May 2015 (p. 1)

order for the many agreements and requests from the summit to be fulfilled, the UWSA will be hosting similar meetings, the announcement from the summit concludes.

Among the 12 parties attending were representatives from Kachin Independence Organization, Kareni National Progressive Party, Karen National Union, Palaung State Liberation Front, Pa-O National Liberation Organization, New Mon State Party, Arakan Army, Restoration Council of Shan State, Shan State Progressive Party, National Democratic Alliance Army and UWSP. Including observers, there were 65 people in attendance.⁴

CHIN PEACE GROUP REVIEWS GOVT-CNF AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

The Chin Peace and Tranquility Committee (CPTC) held a meeting on 28 April with the Chin State government and the Chin National Front (CNF) to re-examine if both parties were abiding by their agreements. Citing a collection of incidents that were seen as violating the agreements, the CPTC, a ceasefire monitoring group, told the 2 parties that they had not acted according to what had been agreed. The CPTC's report, documented between 2013 and 2015, revealed that the State government had violated the agreement 10 occasions and the CNF on 4 occasions.

It included the CNF holding public consultations outside Chin State in Kalay and Tamu towns, Sagaing Region, and talking about politics to Chin university students. The committee also highlighted that Burma Army Light Infantry Battalions No. 266, No. 274 and No. 344 had entered areas occupied by the CNF on several occasions without their knowledge, extorted money from locals and committed rapes. Representatives of the State government told the CPTC that it was not their job to document rapes but the Chin State police force's although the two parties welcomed the meeting admitting their mistakes.

It was the first time the CPTC had organized such a meeting since the signing of the ceasefire agreements between the CNF and both the State and Union governments in 2012. The meeting was attended by a 6-member delegation led by Minister Colonel Zaw Min Oo, Minister of Security and Border Affairs, 7 CNF members led by Khua Uk Lian, 2 observers and 3 CPTC members.⁵

VOTERS' LISTS COMPLETE IN SEVEN RAKHINE STATE TOWNSHIPS

Voters' lists are now complete in 7 of the 17 townships in Rakhine State, says Aung Mya, chairman of the local election sub-commission. The Rakhine State Election Sub-Commission compiled eligible voters' names in the 7 townships in Thandwe and Kyaukphyu districts in the southern part of Rakhine from 19 March 19 to 24 April. The compilation process will continue on 24 April in the remaining 10 townships in Rakhine State.

"The process (in the 10 remaining townships) is 20 per cent done," Aung Mya said. "We are doing a daily update to the list. Efforts are being made to finish in May." There are no plans to release the completed voters' lists until the compilation process is finished in all townships in the northern part of Rakhine State, he said. The process has been slowed by the lack of staff with the necessary computer skills, he added.

⁴ Panghsan summit releases 12-point agreement – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/panghsan-summit-releases-12-point-agreement> (Eleven News Media) 7 May 2015/

Wa will not be NCA signatory –

<http://english.panglong.org/wa-will-not-be-nca-signatory/> (Shan Herald News Agency) 6 May 2015/

UWSA calls for recognition of Wa Autonomous State –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/uwsa-calls-for-recognition-of-wa-autonomous-state-burma-myanmar/50438> (DVB) 2 May 2015

⁵ Chin peace group reviews govt-CNF agreement implementation –

<http://chinlandguardian.com/index.php/chin-news/item/2299-chin-peace-group-reviews-govt-cnf-agreement-implementation> Chinland Guardian 8 May 2015

Preliminary eligible voters' lists have been announced in 10 townships of Yangon. Voters' lists from across the country will remain in the Union Election Commission's data bank after necessary adjustments are made to them. Then, they will be posted for public access on the commission's official website.⁶

MON POLITICAL PARTIES TO PRIORITIZE YOUTHS AND WOMEN AS REPRESENTATIVE IN 2015 ELECTIONS

The Mon National Party (MNP) and the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP) will give priority to youths and women to represent their respective parties in the 2015 general elections. Political parties are required to submit the list of their representatives by May, in order to run in the elections.

Nai Layih Tamarh, MNP's General Secretary said, "In regards to the representatives' qualifications, our party has laid down 18 points which includes the following: representatives must be party members ; adhere to the party's policy ; must be local residents of an area which also must be their birthplace. In addition, they must be recommended by a township-level party. If [all] young people and female representatives have the adequate qualifications, we will give them priority to take part in the elections." Nai Lahyi Tamarh continued to state that he hoped female members of MNP's central committee would participate in the elections. However, he did not know exactly who would participate since they had not provided their applications for election participation yet.

"We have already made decisions at our party central committee meeting. We already informed our township party offices that youths and women would be given priority to be representatives when the party offices submit the list of representatives," Nai San Tin, Joint Secretary (1) of AMDP. Nai San Tin said he estimated that 5 female members from AMDP would contest in the elections, and that the candidates needed to be the party members and Mon nationals. Amongst the qualifications there is a requirement to excel in writing and speaking Mon, whilst meeting qualifications stated in the constitution. "For a constituency that cannot compete, members of Federal Union Party (FUP) will compete instead. We have already negotiated with the FUP," said Nai San Tin.

For the 2015 elections, MNP will be represented by 66 representatives to compete in 10 townships across Mon State and other areas in Karen State and Tenasserim Division, while AMDP has 45 representatives to compete in seven townships, throughout Mon State, and other areas in Karen State and Tenasserim Division.⁷

ANALYSIS

The messages that came through loud and clear from the Panghsan Conference was that the on-going conflicts that have plagued Myanmar are the result of political differences between the government and various ethnic groups and that these conflicts could only be resolved through political means. They said that for the conflicts to be resolved through dialogue a pre-requisite is the need for a national ceasefire that encompasses all ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). Hopes that the Conference would give its seal of approval to the National Ceasefire Accord (NCA) draft failed to transpire. However, the meetings between President Thein Sein and leaders from the RCSS/SSA, Wa Special Region-2 and Mongla Special Regions-4 in Kengtung (Kyaingtone) will contribute in building trust and understanding between all those involved. Myanmar's ethnic conflicts have plagued the country for over half a century and in seeking to end them will require not only negotiations but participation of all stakeholders. The peace process will not end within President Thein Sein's tenure

⁶ Voters' lists complete in seven Rakhine State townships – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/voters-lists-complete-seven-rakhine-state-townships> (Eleven News Media) 6 May 2015

⁷ Mon political parties to prioritize youths and women as representatives in 2015 election contest – <http://monnews.org/2015/05/08/mon-political-parties-to-prioritize-youths-and-women-as-representatives-in-2015-election-contest/> (IMNA) 8 May 2015

and will most probably continue to do so into the next Presidency in 2016. However, basic foundations leading to peace and national reconciliation will need to be laid down and that any initiative taken in reaching those goals should be supported and welcomed. Myanmar's democratic reforms and peace process will not be easy and will continue to face more challenges but it is worth noting that the steps and measures taken by President Thein Sein are those taking the country in the right direction.