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GOVERNMENT PEACE TEAM MEETS WITH MONGLA, WA AND SSA-SOUTH DELEGATIONS

Union Peace-Making Work Committee (UPWC) Vice Chairman Thein Zaw met with delegations led by Chairman of Mongla Special Region (4) Sai Lin and Vice Chairman of Wa Special Region (2) Shao Mi Lian on 22 October. Discussions focussed on the peace process, nationwide ceasefire and sustainable peace, cooperation for the 3 main national causes and ethnic affairs, regional development and matters related to armed forces of all the parties.

Vice Chairman Thein Zaw also held a separate meeting with a delegation led by Shan State Progressive Party/ Shan State Army (SSPP/ SSA) General Secretary Sao Khun Hsai in Lashio, Northern Shan State on 18 October. They discussed the formation of a coordination group comprising members of both sides, elevating the role of liaison offices, arrangements on military affairs between officials of both sides as well as development of the region.¹

UEC CHAIRMAN URGES CSOs TO BE FREE FROM PARTY BIAS IN 2015-GENERAL ELECTION

Union Election Commission (UEC) Chairman Tin Aye called on civil society organizations to be free from political party bias when they observe the upcoming general elections in 2015. At the 3rd workshop on cooperation and coordination between the UEC and CSOs, the UEC Chairman sought the cooperation from political parties, CSOs, media and international aid groups, pledging that the upcoming 2015 general election will be free and fair, which is slated to be held in last week of October or in first week of November 2015. Regarding voting by Myanmar migrant workers in foreign countries, the UEC is planning to establish offices in Malaysia and Thailand with the arrangement of Myanmar embassies in the respective countries.²

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ATTENDS 10TH ASEM MEETING

President Thein Sein attended the 10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Milan Italy on 16 October, where the further strengthening of economic and financial cooperation between Asia and Europe was discussed. The President called for the two regions to focus on stronger monetary and investment regulations and strive for the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises to improve the socioeconomic status of people. He extended invitations to the Europeans to invest in the Dawei deep-sea port project and the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project.

In his address, President Thein Sein said that the Myanmar Government had launched reforms 3 years ago, and is undergoing a peaceful transition from the military rule to the democratic system during the first wave of reform and establishing an all-inclusive political process through national reconciliation. He added that the government has been able to reach ceasefire agreements with almost all armed ethnic groups and Myanmar is now very close to the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement followed by efforts to hold political dialogues.

In addition, he added that considerable progress in human rights protection has been made in Myanmar but the international community has not recognized the progress enough. He noted that Myanmar is taking comprehensive measures for protection of human rights, and urged the European

¹ UPWC delegation met with Mongla and Wa delegations –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 October 2014 (p. 1 & 9)/
Union Peace-making Work Committee meets SSPP/SSA –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-20-red.pdf> (GNLM) 20 October 2014 (p. 1& 3)

² CSOs need to be free from party bias in 2015-general election: UEC Chairman –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 October 2014 (p. 1)

Union to no longer submit reports on human right situations in Myanmar at the 3rd committee of the UN General Assembly every year, as Myanmar is taking measures to sign human rights conventions, trade union conventions and conventions on women and children.

The President also held talks with Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solber and discussed promotion and further strengthening of bilateral ties and cooperation.³

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 19th day meeting on 17 October and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- MP Kyaw Win from Kangyidaunt Constituency asked if the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is independent and about the work being implemented. NHRC Chairman Win Mra said that the commission is an independent government-funded body formed in accordance with the law to protect the fundamental rights of the citizens stated in the state constitution and it implements the strategic plan and projects to promote and protect human rights by compiling human rights reports and answering questions at the United Nations Human Rights Council.**⁴

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 21st day meeting on 21 October and the session took up issues related to agricultural loans, compensations to people with authentic documents of landownership and report on the research findings of the electoral system.

- The Union Election Commission Chairman, read **out a report on the findings of the electoral system for Myanmar. According to the report, there are 12 electoral systems worldwide. The UEC chairman Tin Aye said that the First-Past-The-Post system, the Proportional Representation system and the Parallel system are found to match the political landscape of Myanmar and no country in the world has ever come up with a perfect electoral system. The Chairman cited foreign political experts as suggesting that a country should adopt an electoral system which allows free and fair elections on a level playing field and focuses on stability and peace.**⁵

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 22nd day meeting on 21 October and questions on the census and status of the ethnic population was discussed.

- MP Daw Nang Sae Awa from Hpa-an Constituency raised the **question on the preliminary list of population conducted in 2014 and the details of ethnic population in the country. Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population Win Myint said that the preliminary list of population of 2014 has detailed the number of men and women living in villages, townships, states and regions and that the report had been submitted to both Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House). The Deputy Minister** also said that **this initial**

³ Myanmar President urges Asia and Europe to emphasize stronger monetary and investment regulations – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 October 2014 (p. 1 & 3) / President U Thein Sein urges EU to end submission of reports on human rights situation in Myanmar at UN General Assembly –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 October 2014 (p. 3) / President U Thein Sein meets Prime Ministers of Finland, Sweden, Vietnam, Norway – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 October 2014 (p. 3)

⁴ Pyithu Hluttaw raises questions on national human rights commission and food safety at schools – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 October 2014 (p. 2)

⁵ Farmers run into difficulty with settlement of loans because of reduced agricultural production – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 October 2014 (p. 2)

report would be different from the major census which will come up in 2015, but it will include only the population of ethnic people without their ethnicity, religions and employments. However, the Deputy Minister said that the detailed lists would be issued after discussing with respective ethnic groups, and will take more times.⁶

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 21st day meeting on 21 October and issues related to plans for medical doctors and nurses from private sector to join post-graduate courses, constructions of school facilities, laboratories and staff quarters as well as the bill on protection of ethnic people rights were discussed at the session.

- Regarding the bill on protection of ethnic people rights, Nay Win Tun from Shan State constituency No.9, suggested the word 'ethnic people' should be substituted with 'union ethnic people', as the former might be assumed that Bama does not involve in the group of all ethnics such as Shan, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon and Rakhine, and that term of 'union ethnic people' would be more appropriate. MP Myat Ko of Sagaing region constituency No. 12, said that if the term ethnic people are defined as the ethnic groups who have been living in Myanmar, is in accord with the State Constitution. He also said the definition will be more complete only if the number of ethnic groups can be verified. MP Boe Yei from Kayah state constituency No. 3, urged the government to accelerate development programmes in conflict-torn ethnic villages. MP Shu Maung of Shan State constituency No. 8, said that the development programmes in the conflict areas were destroyed by armed groups, causing the residents to leave their properties. J Yaw Wu from Kayah State constituency No.12, said the rehabilitation programmes and peace processes should be made simultaneously, and that any failure would have a negative impact in the conflict-torn areas. Military parliamentary representative Lt-Col Thein Lwin submitted a statement emphasising that internal peace is essential for the prosperity of the country, and that the peace process should be prioritized in the reform plan of the government. And in doing so, could sign agreements with some ethnic armed organizations not only on ceasefire agreements but also on cooperation of regional development, human rights, environmental conservation, humanitarian aid, fight against drug trafficking, education, health and resettlement of internally displaced people due to the civil conflict.⁷

The 11th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 22nd day meeting on 22 October and the following issues were raised and discussed.

- MP Maung Aye Tun of Rakhine State Constituency No 9 asked if there is a plan to adopt arrangements for farm-less and homeless persons as part of effort to ensure poverty alleviation. Deputy Minister for Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development Tin Ngwe replied that the Region and State governments are making arrangements to allot land plots to farm-less and homeless persons and also to release confiscated farmlands back to its original owners.
- Regarding the Community Housing Bill, MP Pe Thaug of Kachin State Constituency No. 6 discussed the need for government departments, INGOs and NGOs to cooperate and establish drug addict training centres for the youths in the affected townships.⁸

⁶ Pyithu Hluttaw holds 22nd day meeting –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 October 2014 (p. 2)

⁷ Amyotha Hluttaw meets on 21st day –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 October 2014 (p. 2)

⁸ State and region governments to allot land plots to farm less and homeless persons under village and town plans –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 October 2014 (p. 2)

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 11th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 16th day meeting on 22 October and included discussions on a Constitutional amendment.

- The Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw called on MPs to conduct the debate on the constitutional amendment with goodwill and in doing so would produce a positive outcome. Speaker Thura Shwe Mann, the Secretary and the Joint-Secretary of the Constitutional Amendment Implementation Committee also urged the representatives to debate the amendments with positive attitude in a transparent manner, placing emphases on stability and development of the country, national unity, national reconciliation, democratic transition and interest of the nation and citizens.⁹

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ETHNIC PARTIES MERGE PLANS FOR POLITICAL PEACE TALKS

Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF) Chairman Dr. Kan Cin Dal told local news media on 15 October that ethnic parties have drawn up 4 frameworks which have been combined into one single framework to be used during the political dialogue process after the signing of a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Dr. Kan Cin Dal said they now have a single framework but the National League for Democracy and the governing Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) “have not joined us” yet.

The 4 frameworks were not too different, so there was no difficulty in merging them, NBF spokesman Sai Saw Than Myint. The final framework includes a list of which groups will participate in the proposed political dialogue and offer a guide to the style of the dialogue.

The NBF drew up 2 framework plans, and the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and the Federal Democratic Alliance (FDA) drew up one each. These political umbrella groups include a total of more than 50 political parties. They chose 15 representatives and formed a committee to establish a framework for political dialogue.

The 15-member committee’s political framework will be submitted to the government and will conduct further negotiations, according to Dr. Kan Cin Dal. In late October, they will hold discussions about the final political framework with ethnic armed group leaders in Nay Pyi Taw.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has been separately drawing up a framework for the political dialogue and it will be ready in time, according to party central executive member Tun Tun Hein. Similarly the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has also been separately drawing up their proposal.¹⁰

KAREN WOMEN’S GROUPS SUPPORT REUNIFICATION OF ETHNIC ARMED FORCES

An alliance of Karen women’s organisations, the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO), the Karen Women’s Empowerment Group (KWE) and the Karen Women’s Union (KWU), released a statement on 19 October giving their support to announcement by 4 Karen armed groups on 13 October to reunite under the Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF) banner.

The women’s alliance said the reunification of the 4 Karen armed groups “meets the long held desire of Karen people everywhere, especially of Karen women. We believe this is an opportunity for both

⁹ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw speaker urges representatives to debate constitutional amendment with positive attitude – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs19/GNLM2014-10-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 October 2014 (p. 2)

¹⁰ Ethnic parties merge plans for political peace talks – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/politics/item/13840-ethnic-parties-merge-plans-for-political-peace-talks> (Mizzima) 17 October 2014

peace building, and improved co-operation that can help reduce violence against women.” The alliance spokeswomen pointed in its statement that the Karen armed forces were once united before under the same banner.

KWU Member Naw Ohn Hla said the Karen community had been waiting for a long time for the different armed groups to shelve their factional differences and unite to fight a common cause. “Our community has been hoping for the reunification of different Karen armed groups for a long time. We, the Karen people are not afraid of unity among the armed groups. Rather, we are afraid of the splits and disunity that have had a serious impact on the daily lives of local people. I am both encouraged by and fully support the unification of Karen organizations by the forming of KAF. This is right time to show our unity.”

The 4 Karen armed groups that took the decision to form the KAF include: the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), and the KNU/KNLA Peace Council.

KWEG Director Susanna Hla Hla Soe said that the Karen people needed unity. “I never believe there is danger in unity. It is the lack of unity that can destroy our chances for sustainable peace in our country. This unification can help lead to more unity throughout the Karen community,” she added.¹¹

BURMA TO FORM COUNTER-TERRORISM UNIT

Transnational Crime Department Director Police Brig-Gen Soe Myint said that government is planning to establish a central agency comprised of representatives from various government ministries to fight terrorism. He said the move is an implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Law that was passed by parliament in June.

“In accordance with provisions in the Anti-Terrorism Law, working committees will be formed,” he said. “We propose appointing the minister of home affairs as the body’s chair with Burma’s police chief as secretary. “As anti-terrorism is a broad subject, the body will include representatives from various concerned government ministries. We are currently working on these details and will make an official announcement once it is confirmed.” He added the body will consist of around 40 members and will be formed “as soon as possible”, although there is no specific timeframe.

In September, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri announced in a video clip posted on the internet that the group was forming a new branch in the Indian subcontinent with operations in Bangladesh and Burma. On 13 October, documents were found on an Air Kanbawza airplane at Mandalay International Airport related to terrorist group the Islamic State, or ISIS. “Based on our analysis on past incidents, there is no link between terrorists in Burma and global terror networks – the attacks that took place inside Burma were carried out by smaller groups which are remnants of larger insurgent organisations using homemade weapons and devices,” said Soe Myint. “However, according to the Al Qaeda chief, the extremists are now also targeting Burma and stepping up their recruitment drive globally,” he said. “We believe it is necessary to take preventative measures and adopt laws to deal with any acts of terrorism if they take place in Burma.”¹²

¹¹ Karen Women’s Groups Support Reunification Of Ethnic Armed Forces – <http://karennews.org/2014/10/karen-womens-groups-support-reunification-of-ethnic-armed-forces.html/> (Karen News) 20 October 2014

¹² Burma to form Counter-Terrorism Unit – <http://english.dvb.no/news/burma-to-form-counter-terrorism-unit-myanmar/45282> (DVB) 21 October 2014

KAREN STATE MINISTER ORDER THE RETURN OF CONFISCATED LANDS TO FARMERS

Karen State Chief Minister has ordered businessmen who have been granted land concession to lands confiscated from local villagers in the Hti Lon area in Hlaing Bwe Township and to return them back to its traditional owners.

Forestry Department official from Hlaing Bwe Township Kyaw Soe Hlaing said that Karen State Chief Minister Zaw Min had issued a directive on 5 September to return the lands that were seized by businessmen in Hti Lon and Kyone Pa Ko areas. The lands are in reserve forest areas in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State and were used by local farmers.

As part of the first step in the process to return the lands to the local farmers, the minister held a meeting with 30 farmers and forest department officials at Kyone Pa Ko village administrative department office on 16 October. The purpose of the meeting was to conduct a field survey and to make sure accurate lands measurement were taken.

Saw Aung Thein, a farmers' leader who attended the meeting said, "the farmers really appreciate the Chief Minister for giving this directive. However, farmers still have to wait and see when their lands will be returned. The farmers were told lands measurement would be carried out as a first step. Then the implementation process will be carried out step-by-step."

Sources from the forest department officials and confirmed by local farmers, alleged that local businessman Myint Oo had confiscated more than 700 acres of lands for his rubber plantation in the area and that the Chief Minister had asked him to return it to the farmers. Farmers produced evidence and documents that the lands confiscated by Myint Oo were more than 700 acres; a claim denied by Myint Oo.

The lands in Kyone Pa Ko and Hti Lone reserve forest areas belong to and have been occupied by local residents for generations. Relations between landowners and local residents became strained in 2010 as land was taken by businesses for rubber plantations.¹³

ANALYSIS

The meetings between the Wa, the Mongla and the SSA-South with the Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC) are timely and comes at a time when recent clashes in the Shan State have raised concerns about the direction of the on-going peace process. The fact that concerned parties are talking and have agreed to continue to meet is indeed encouraging. Mistrust runs deep on both sides after decades of fighting, which has left ethnic minority areas under-developed. Continued fighting, small or big instances, will only lead to further tensions. However, a key question as to why military offensives against EAOs at a time when peace negotiations are ongoing still remains unclear. The on-going peace process has reached a crucial point where details need to be clearly defined and agreed on. The crucial role of the Tatmadaw not only in the peace process but also in politics cannot be ignored and any initiative or agreement without its endorsement will not be lasting. The Tatmadaw and the EAOs need to be convinced that peace is the only way forward. While any peace deal must be just and equitable but more importantly accommodate the real aspirations of the ethnic groups based on equality and self-determination.

¹³ Karen State Minister Order The Return Of Confiscated Lands To Farmers – <http://karennews.org/2014/10/karen-state-minister-order-the-return-of-confiscated-lands-to-farmers.html/> (Karen News) 24 October 2014