
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 14

MON PARTY WANTS STATE GOVERNMENT TO FOCUS ON MORE JOBS

The All Mon Region Democratic Party (AMRDP) party is calling on the state government to focus on job creation as a means in curbing the flow of people seeking jobs outside the Mon State. According to sources close to the issue, several hundred thousand locals from Mon State have migrated to neighbouring Thailand to find work. While the limited number of local plantations in Mon State provide some employment, they cannot create enough jobs, according to AMRDP chairman Nai Ngwe Thein. "In Mon State, there are only a few factories and they don't create many jobs. For young people, it's easy to find work in neighbouring countries, leaving elders and children here." He said they even young people who have not finished high school can easily find work out of the country. There are an estimated 400,000 Mon migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia, mostly employed in factories. The current population of Mon State is about 8 million and even many local rubber plantation workers have sought work on rubber plantations in Thailand. Nai Ngwe Thein also added that the state government must also solve the problem of the Burmese military confiscating rubber plantations. "If the government can solve that, it will reduce problems for the people," he said. Under the newly established state government, a former military official has been entrusted with the job of Chief Minister of State. Of the 9 state ministers, Dr. Min Nwe Soe (Mudon Constituency No. 2) and Nai Lawi Aung (a) Nai Myint Swe (Yay Constituency No. 1) from AMRDP have been appointed to serve on the regional government. From a total of 31 parliamentary seats representing Mon State, 14 MPs are from the USDP, 7 are from the AMRDP, 2 are from the National Unity Party (NUP) and 8 have been nominated as military-appointed representatives.¹

KAREN POLITICAL PARTY CALLS FOR PEACE IN KAREN STATE

The Kayin People's Party (KPP) says it wants to end all armed conflicts with the Burmese army and Karen ethnic armed groups for the sake of economic development in Karen State. "Although many schools and roads were built in Karen State, the armed conflicts have severely affected the development of the region", said KPP General Secretary Saw Say Wah. "Development and peace are strongly related, so we need to try to achieve a mutual understanding." He said that he wants the Karen State regional government to launch development plans, but that could be difficult to carry out immediately. Recently, the Karen National Union (KNU), the major armed group in Karen State, and a breakaway faction of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have engaged in running battles with government troops in the State. According to Saw Say Wah, one of the major obstacles may be the Chief Minister of the Karen State government, who is a military-appointed representative. At present, Brigadier General Zaw Min, the ex-chairman of the now defunct Karen State Peace and Development Council, has been chosen as Chief Minister of the state government and, under these circumstances, many locals in Karen State would have preferred the post to be given to an ethnic Karen national. Saw Say Wah added that another important need of the Karen people is the right to teach Karen language and literature in the state.²

¹ Mon party wants state government to focus on more jobs – <http://mizzima.com/news/election-2010/5146-mon-party-wants-state-government-to-focus-on-more-jobs.html> (Mizzima) 12 April 2011

² Karen Political Party calls for peace in Karen State – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/5141-karen-political-party-calls-for-peace-in-karen-state.html> (Mizzima) 11 April 2011

POLITICAL PARTIES WELCOME FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT

Ten political parties have welcomed the formation of the new government led by President Thein Sein and urged that the new administration keep its promises and implement all measures as stated in the president's inaugural speech. In their statement, the ten parties stated that Burma's transition to democracy has been viewed with suspicion by individuals and groups from both inside the country as well as foreign governments. Under such circumstances, the ten parties have called for and urged the granting of a general amnesty as well as measures to implement national reconciliation to be considered in order to remove all suspicions and doubts of goodwill of the new administration. The parties which jointly issued the statement include: the Democratic Party (Myanmar), the Ethnic Democratic Force Party, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), the Rakhine Nationals Development Party (RNDP), the Democracy and Peace Party, the Union Democracy Party, the Wunthanu NLD, the National Political Alliances League, the Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party and the Chin National Party (CNP). In a separate statement, Daw Than Than Nu, General-Secretary of the Democratic Party (Myanmar), said that the positive elements within the president's speech are acceptable, while at the same time it is crucially important for these elements to be translated into concrete actions. She also added that the knowledge and expertise of professionals from all walks of life is crucial in building a modern state and thus efforts should be made for their inclusion in the process. According to the leader of the National Democratic Force (NDF), Khin Maung Swe, the lack of trust and unwillingness to work together have become major barriers for the government and democratic forces in shaping the present political climate. As such, the need to implement and establish mutual understanding coupled with reconciliation is key in bringing the two sides closer. Furthermore, Khin Maung Swe added that an all-inclusive economic package to cater to the needs of all stakeholders should be considered, while, at the same time, all debate should be undertaken to serve the interest of the public.³

THAI FOREIGN MINISTER URGES NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN BURMA

In a recent meeting with his Burmese counterpart, Wunna Maung Lwin, Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya stressed and hoped that Burma's national reconciliation process, including negotiations with all ethnic groups, would achieve progress. During their meeting, the two foreign ministers also discussed several issues of mutual interest, including the security along the Thai-Burma border. Furthermore, Wunna Maung Lwin stated efforts are being undertaken by the Burmese to implement the Agreement for the Avoidance for Double Taxation (2002) and the Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investment (2004). The Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman, Thani Thongpakdi, also expressed his government's desire to see the entry into force and implementation of these agreements. While attending the special informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on East Asia, Burma's Foreign Minister, U Wunna Maung Lwin, also met with the Singaporean Foreign Minister, George Yeo.⁴

³ Political Parties Welcomes Formation of New Government – <http://www.myanmar.mmtimes.com/2011/news/513/news02.html> (Myanmar Times) 14 April 2011

⁴ Thai Foreign Minister Urges for National Reconciliation in Myanmar – <http://burmese.dvb.no/news.php?id=14050> (DVB) 12 April 2011

ANALYSIS

With the parliamentary assemblies in recess and the Burmese New Year “*Thingyan*” in full swing, many observers and the international community are left pondering “What next for Burma”? However, the newly elected government has not wasted much time in sending its representative to the regional ASEAN summit in Bangkok. Such initiatives have, in the past, provided legitimacy as well as much needed support for a country branded as undemocratic. The Burmese government has also taken the opportunity to brief close regional neighbours on recent developments and convey its desire to promote continued cooperation. This method of practicing diplomacy and inter-state relations has served Burma well in the past.

The recent calls made by ethnic parties for job creation and a peaceful resolution to the on-going conflict in the Karen state must be taken seriously and the means to address the issues explored. It is crucial for the government, the political parties and all stakeholders to have detailed discussions at length, with the aim of seeking a long-term sustainable outcome. While calls and demands for peace and development within these regions are not new, how the new administration led by President Thein Sein in tackling this issue will be a major challenge. His sincerity and goodwill will no doubt be put to the test.