
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 12

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN ATTENDS ASIAN-AFRICAN SUMMIT

President Thein Sein attended the Asian-African Summit held in Jakarta from 22 to 23 April. The Myanmar President attended the opening ceremony of the Asian-African Conference Commemoration on 22 April together with leaders and representatives from more than 100 countries and international organizations. The conference under the theme " Strengthening South-South Cooperation to Promote World Peace and Prosperity " adopted a 10-point declaration incorporating the principles of the United Nations Charter.

In his address to the Conference, President Thein Sein said that recent years have seen significant developments in the various sectors of international relations, with today's challenges more complicated than those of 60 years ago. Poverty, underdevelopment, infectious diseases, environmental damage, water shortages and desertification remained the major concerns that need to be tackled, and it was crucial for the two continents to work together across a variety of sectors including trade, technology and health, the president said. In conclusion, President Thein Sein expressed his hope that the Bandung spirit of principles of unity, friendship and cooperation will continue to flourish among Asia.

During the summit, the Myanmar President held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hassina and Nepalese Premier Sushil Koirala. President Thein Sein and Chinese President Xi discussed the situation along the border between the two countries, development of Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone and cooperation in agriculture, industry, finance, electrical energy, as well as rural development and poverty alleviation programmes and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank.¹

MYANMAR PRESIDENT ATTENDS 26TH ASEAN SUMMIT IN MALAYSIA

Myanmar President Thein Sein together with 10 ASEAN Leaders attended the opening ceremony of the 26th ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre on 27 April.

During the Plenary Session of the Conference, President Thein Sein pledged Myanmar's support and cooperation to implement the 8 principles adopted by the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN in accordance with its slogan 'Our People, Our Vision, Our Community'. He also noted that member countries of the bloc need to implement ASEAN Beyond 2015 as per the Nay Pyi Taw Declaration, along with the Post-2015 Development Agenda of the United Nations. ASEAN leaders then held separate discussions with representatives of the ASEAN Inter-Parliament Assembly, ASEAN Business Advisory Council, ASEAN Youth and social organizations.

The President also attended the 12th ASEAN Leadership Forum together with Chairman of the forum, Sultan of Perak Darul Ridzuan, Sultan Narzin Muizzuddin Shah, the Prime Minister of Cambodia Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Laos Mr. Thongsing Thammavong, the trade and industry

¹ President U Thein Sein visits Indonesia for Asian-African Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-22.pdf> (GNLM) 22 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
President U Thein Sein attends opening ceremony of 2015 Asian-African Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-23.pdf> (GNLM) 23 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
Asian African Summit concludes upholding Bandung principles – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-24.pdf> (GNLM) 24 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
President U Thein Sein hails Bandung spirit at Asian African Summit – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-25.pdf> (GNLM) 25 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

minister of the Philippines, who attended the forum on behalf of the President of the Philippines and ministers and officials from the ASEAN.

In his speech to the forum, President Thein Sein said that the year 2015 is an important year for ASEAN and it will be a significant historic milestone of efforts for ASEAN integration under one vision and one community. It also is a year to finalize post-2015 programmes and objectives to strengthen ASEAN integration and the importance of the forum in the circumstance is recognized by ASEAN leaders, according to the president. President Thein Sein added that the forum, which has been organized for 12 years, is a regional leadership programme that enables ASEAN leaders, regional business leaders, civil society organizations, experts and scholars to meet one another. As the forum is scheduled to discuss post-2015 vision and programme of the ASEAN, the discussions will contribute to current and future tasks of the ASEAN community, the president added. In conclusion, the president expressed his hope that development of a regional architecture to achieve objectives of ASEAN integration depends on cooperation of dialogue partners and other regional partners, and the yearly forum will be able to develop useful trends to that end.²

PGM PRAISES AND SUPPORTS REFORM EFFORTS OF GOVERNMENT

The Myanmar delegation led by the Union Minister at the President's Office Soe Thane attended the meeting of the Partnership Group for Peace, Development and Democracy in Myanmar at the UN headquarters in New York on 24 April. Present at the meeting were United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Advisor to the UNSG for Myanmar VJ Nambia, 10 permanent representatives and 4 deputy permanent representatives of the PGM and US Deputy-Assistant Secretary of State Mr Scot Marciel. At the meeting, Mr Ban Ki-moon said the reform process initiated by the Myanmar government continued to progress steadily and the result of the first census conducted in 30 year would be available soon despite some controversies. The secretary-general continued to say that the general election due to be held by year's end would be an important milestone and conducting it in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner would be important. He said President Thein Sein's efforts to engage in political dialogue with other leaders on key issues including constitutional reform had been encouraging. Mr Ban said that after 16 months of intermittent negotiations, the government and the ethnic armed groups reached agreement on the test of a nation-wide ceasefire accord on 31 March to end more than 60 years of armed conflicts, and said it was important for the accord to be signed as soon as possible.

Leader of the Myanmar delegation Union Minister Soe Thane said the government had succeeded in reaching some significant benchmarks during the four years of the president's term, and has been making relentless efforts to build a new Myanmar that is peaceful, democratic and inclusive, with sustainable economic development. The union minister added that since democratisation processes are very difficult, the goal has been pursued with the utmost care to ensure a smooth transition. The union minister later said the government would greatly appreciate and welcome insight and reasonable consideration from different perspectives, asking the participants for understanding. Minister Soe Thane pointed out that Myanmar lagged behind other countries in the regions in health, education and social protection due to sanctions. In conclusion, the union minister said the government had committed to developing a multiparty democracy, and significant developments were visible in Myanmar.

² Regional leaders open 26th ASEAN Summit in Malaysia –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/28_April-15_gnlm-red-op.pdf (GNLM) 28 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/
President U Thein Sein delivers speech at 12th ASEAN Leadership Forum in Kuala Lumpur –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-27-red-op.pdf> (GNLM) 27 April 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

Representatives from 15 member countries also engaged in discussions and praised the success in political, economic and social reforms and urged the government to make efforts regarding the situation in Rakhine State and the important 2015 elections.³

SPEAKER THURA SHWE MANN VISITS CHINA

At the invitation of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Pyidaungsu and Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann paid an official visit to China on 25 April. In his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping On 27 April, the Speaker said Myanmar and China have a long tradition of economic cooperation, exchange of investment and technology, and promotion of trade and culture, and the good relations between the two countries can bring about development and stability. Thura Shwe Mann also told President Xi that Myanmar appreciates China's understanding and acceptance of its political system and called China's policies for peaceful development realistic and pragmatic, expressing admiration for its non-interference in affairs of other countries as well as its respect for Myanmar's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that the continuity of good bilateral relations is a product of the hard work of successive leaders of the two countries. He called for constant implementation of the five policies of peaceful coexistence and the 10-point guideline formulated by the Bandung Conference, showing his country's support for Myanmar's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also hinted at further cooperation in areas of mutual development with Myanmar. Thura Shwe Mann and party also met the Secretary of Guangdong Province's CPC Hu Chunhua and Head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Wang Jiarui and exchanged views on promotion of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.⁴

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

SNLD COMPLAINS OF BEING LEFT OUT OF LOOP ON TALKS

A major ethnic group has complained of being left out of the 6-way talks on revising the constitution. On 22 April, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) issued a statement criticising the representative of ethnic groups taking part in the talks.

The statement said the Chair of the Rakhine National Party (RNA) U Aye Maung, who was designated to represent all ethnic groups in the talks, had failed to consult them. Aye Maung was quoted in local media as saying that he had briefed the ethnic political parties on his participation in the talks and that his briefing had been approved.

The talks bring together the so-called Big Six to resolve such matters as proposals to revise the 2008 constitution, on which parliament is currently deadlocked. They include President Thein Sein; the Speakers of the two houses of parliament, Thura Shwe Mann and Khin Aung Myint; Armed Forces Commander-in-chief General Min Aung Hlaing; opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; and U Aye Maung, who was designated as the representative of all ethnic parties by parliament.

After many unexplained delays, the 6 met on 10 April at the president's residence in Nay Pyi Taw. Secretary of the SNLD Sai Nyunt Lwin, said that U Aye Maung had not briefed his party and that the

³ PGM praises and supports reform efforts of government –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-30.pdf> (GNLM) 30 April 2015 (p. 1 & 2)

⁴ Good Myanmar-China relations can yield development, stability: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-29.pdf> (GNLM) 29 April 2015 (p. 2)/
Parliamentary speaker visits Guangzhou –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/28_April-15_gnlm-red-op.pdf (GNLM) 28 April 2015 (p. 3)/
Myanmar, China to promote cooperation in politics, business, technology –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-04-27-red-op.pdf> (GNLM) 27 April 2015 (p. 3)

SNLD had not agreed with his presentation. "We're not aware of any agreements," he said. U Aye Maung could not be reached for comments.⁵

KIO, GOVT AGREE TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION TALKS

Representatives of the Burmese government and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) have agreed to a round of talks with regard to recurring military clashes in Hpakant and Tanai townships in Kachin State. Ethnic Kachin peace negotiator Sant Aung told local news media on 23 April that a so-called Conflict Negotiation Commission (CNC), made up of 5 delegates from both sides, will sit for talks within the next few days. The move comes after 4 clashes were reported to have occurred between the Burmese army and the Kachin rebels in Hpakant's Kansee and Tanai's Shwemaw areas in the past week.

"The fighting in Hpakant and Tanai necessitated the commission which will hold the negotiations," said Sant Aung. "As the KIO delegates will have no free time in the next month, the meeting should take place around 25 or 26 April at the KIA [Kachin Independent Army]'s liaison office in Myitkyina." The CNC, formed under a preliminary agreement between the government's Union Peace-Making Work Committee and the KIO in October 2013, was originally supposed to hold monthly meetings starting in October 2014, but those were suspended following a Burmese artillery attack on a Kachin training camp that killed 23 cadets. The commission finally met for the first time on 6 April 2015 when they discussed the resumption of regular talks, agreeing to meetings every 2 months.⁶

NDF TO CONTEST 400 SEATS IN NATIONWIDE 2015 POLL

The National Democratic Force (NDF) party says it is prepared to field about 400 candidates in regional and Union-level races during the nationwide parliamentary elections due late this year.

Chairman of the NDF Khin Maung Swe told local news media that the party would contest about 200 races in the Union Parliament, where 498 seats are up for grabs in early November. Another 200 candidates or so will enter state and regional parliamentary races, where about 660 seats will be put to a vote nationwide. "We will run in constituencies in 11 states and divisions, excluding Kayah [Karenni], Arakan and Chin states," he said. Khin Maung Swe said that the party's township offices are sending lists of nominees, with about 140 candidates already selected to run for Union Parliament seats. "The candidates list will be finalized on 16 to 17 May, when the party will hold its conference in Yangon [Rangoon]," he said, adding that his party planned for the list to include 20 percent female candidates. Khin Maung Swe said the party's membership numbered more than 40,000, and that the NDF has 180 offices nationwide. The NDF has not put forward a campaign platform yet, he said, but would do so once the election's campaigning season official begins 60 days before polling day. Its Facebook page says the party "has five major objectives that primarily included transforming Myanmar into a democratic union in which all ethnic nationalities have equal rights and status." NDF parliamentarians have been some of the main supporters of a controversial interfaith marriage bill that was submitted to Parliament late last year. Critics of the legislation say the bill creates unnecessary hurdles for Buddhist women seeking to marry a man of a different faith. Proponents say the bill is needed to safeguard Burma's majority Buddhist national identity.

The NDF contested 161 seats in Burma's 2010 general elections, winning 12 seats in the Union Parliament and four seats in state and regional legislatures. In the 2012 by-election, the party fielded

⁵ SNLD complains of being left out of loop on talks –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/14108-snld-complains-of-being-left-out-of-loop-on-talks.html>
(Myanmar Times) 24 April 2015

⁶ KIO, govt agree to conflict resolution talks –

<http://www.dvb.no/news/kio-govt-agree-to-conflict-resolution-talks-burma-myanmar/50141> (DVB) 23 April 2015

candidates in 13 races but did not win any seats in a poll that was dominated by the National League for Democracy (NLD).

The NDF is a breakaway group from the NLD, Burma's largest opposition party. An NLD decision to boycott the 2010 election on the grounds that it would not be a credible poll prompted Khin Maung Swe and other leading NLD members to found the new party to contest the polls, claiming that the election could pave the way for gradual democratic reform in Burma. In breaking with the NLD, the NDF in 2010 aligned itself with a so-called "third force" movement, the stated aim of which was to steer a middle path between the boycotting NLD and Burma's former military regime. The NDF was the third largest party contesting the 2010 election, following the regime-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the National Unity Party (NUP).

Khin Maung Swe said the party in March had forged another iteration of the third force movement, together with the United Democratic Party (UDP), Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP) and Arakan National Party (ANP), in an effort to counterbalance the influence of larger parties in Parliament.⁷

EU PLEDGES 1 BLN EUROS' NEW GRANT AID TO MYANMAR

Myanmar's state-run media reported on 22 April that the European Union (EU) has pledged over 1 billion euros (1.33 billion U.S. dollars) in a new grant aid to Myanmar in support of its political and economic development.

Besides the political and trade support, the EU will assist Myanmar with more than 1 billion euros of development aid in the form of non-refundable grants, in particular in the areas of rural development, education, governance and peace-building, amongst others, EU Ambassador Roland Kobia was quoted as saying. In December last year, EU pledged to provide 688 million euros (900 million U.S. dollars) in aid to Myanmar under a 7-year strategic cooperation program (2014-20).

The fund, which is aimed to reinforce EU's support to the country's multiple transitions, will help develop rural areas, improve food and nutrition security, governance and rule of law, and support education and peace process, the EU statement said. Moreover, the two sides are also cooperating in bilateral human rights and police reform to attain international standard.⁸

KAYAN LEADERS PUSH FOR AUTONOMY

Ethnic Kayan leaders are calling for the group to be given its own self-administered zone, with territory to be carved out of Shan and Kayah states. Myanmar's constitution created 5 self-administered zones – for the Naga, Pa-O, Danu, Palaung and Kokang – and a Wa Self-Administered Region. However, it makes no provision for the Kayan, a subgroup of which are known as Padaung and are famous for the bronze coils women wear around their necks.

Lieutenant Colonel Win Maung from the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) said self-administration was important to the Kayan. "The development of our race has to be undertaken by us. We plan to ask the government for [self-administration]," he said. "There are already other self-administered regions in Shan State. I don't see why we can't also have self-administration." He said the group had previously called for self-administration, without any result, but was heartened by plans to amend the 2008 constitution.

⁷ NDF to Contest 400 Seats in Nationwide 2015 Poll – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ndf-to-contest-400-seats-in-nationwide-2015-poll.html> (the Irrawaddy) 22 April 2015

⁸ EU pledges 1 bln euros' new grant aid to Myanmar – <http://www.globalpost.com/article/6523978/2015/04/22/eu-pledges-1-bl-euros-new-grant-aid-myanmar> (Global Post)

Most Kayan live in Demawso Township, Kayah State, and Pekon Township, Shan State. Kayan Literature and Culture Association Chair Than Soe Naing said his group was collecting data to support its bid for greater autonomy. "We will push for self-administration until we obtain it," he said.⁹

MORE THAN 300,000 WHITE CARDS RETURNED: GOVERNMENT

Rakhine State Immigration Department Director Khin Soe told local media on 28 April, that state immigration officers have collected more than 300,000 white cards in the past 4 weeks. He said that figure represented half of all of the white-card holders in Rakhine.

In February, the President's Office announced that the cards, which have been distributed to temporary citizens, would be invalid from March 31. Holders have been given until 31 May to return them. The decision followed protests prompted by parliament's decision to allow white-card holders to vote in a planned referendum.

More than 83 percent of white-card holders live in Rakhine State, and most are held by Muslims who identify as Rohingya. The handback began slowly, but has gathered speed since, said immigration director U Khin Soe. "As of today, we have received 300,432 white cards, nearly half the 660,000 issued in Rakhine State. We believe we can recover them all by the end of May," U Khin Soe said yesterday. "In some camps, they are still afraid of surrendering their cards. But as soon as they clearly understand that the current white cards are useless, I am sure they will give them up," he added.

In collecting the cards, the authorities check the number against ministry records. "If the card numbers don't match our records, we will not take them. Otherwise, we will accept all cards even if the photo is unclear or the card is torn," U Khin Soe said.

Collection began across the country on April 1. It is not yet clear what document, if any, will eventually be given to the former white-card holders. The issue may again become contentious in the context of the referendum to be held on amendments to the constitution, as well as the November election. According to the ministry, there are 797,504 white-card holders around the country. Only Kayah State and western Bago Region have no white-card holders.¹⁰

ANALYSIS

The visit to China by Speaker of the Union Parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) Thura Shwe Mann at a time when clashes between government forces and the Kokang group on the Myanmar-China border reflects that both governments are keen to promote and good bilateral ties. Furthermore, the visit is also significant in that Speaker Thura Shwe Mann could also be making preparations in laying the groundwork to establish closer relations with the Chinese leadership in Beijing in anticipating his election to the Presidency later this year. Thura Shwe Mann has in the past stated clearly that he would be happy to serve as President. At the same, the recent announcement by the National Democratic Forces (NDF) to field nearly 400 candidates in the upcoming elections is a reflection that Myanmar is slowly moving away from one-party rule to multi-party democracy. However, it remains to be seen as to the extent on how these parties and politicians alike will be able to function in Myanmar's new found democratic society. And the pledge by the European Union to assist the Myanmar's on-going democratic process is indeed encouraging though aid and grants alone cannot guarantee success and that the onus is on the government to deliver on its promises on holding free and fair elections and beyond 2015.

⁹ Kayan leaders push for autonomy – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/14054-kayan-leaders-push-for-autonomy.html> (Myanmar Times) 22 April 2015

¹⁰ More than 300,000 white cards returned: government – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/14171-more-than-300-000-white-cards-returned-government.html> (Myanmar Times) 29 April 2015

The SNDP's statement regarding its position and its dissatisfaction on the way the recent 6-party talks were conducted is an indication not only on the lack of transparency but more importantly the need to implement an all-inclusive national reconciliation process. This once again underlines the crucial need on the involvement of all stakeholders in the on-going democratic transition. While it is not an easy task to address the needs of all stakeholders entirely, it is important to note that from time to time the decisions taken by the government, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) or political parties or even civil society groups will not meet the needs or demands of stakeholders and that they have been made in the best interest of the country and people.