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## POLITICAL MONITOR NO.15

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MAKES BURMESE NEW YEAR ADDRESS**

In his address to the nation on 14 April, President Thein Sein said that the New Year symbolizes washing away the ills and sins of the previous year, and that the conflicts which occurred during the past year should be cleansed away. He also stressed the need to adopt greater transparency and to have national solidarity as a basis to overcome the crisis's and challenges to be faced in the future. The President urged the people to be on alert for violence instigated from internal and external destructive elements witnessed during the past year and to usher in the New Year with the realization on the need for firm establishment of peace and stability based on compassion.<sup>1</sup>

#### **GOVERNMENT'S PEACE-MAKING COMMITTEE HOLD TALKS WITH KARENNI GROUP**

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) ethnic armed group reiterated its desire to achieve genuine peace at a meeting held on 12 April between KNPP and the government in Loikaw, Kayah State. The two sides discussed issues related to the construction of a new KNPP liaison office, regional development projects including the opening of a border trade camp. The KNPP delegation expressed its firm belief in overcoming difficulties in the peace process and stated their strong desire in working hand in hand with the government to develop the region. The ceasefire between KNPP and the government was reached on 7 March last year and Union-level peace talks were held on 9 June, the same year.<sup>2</sup>

### UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **UK TO BACK BURMA PEACE EFFORTS**

The Burmese government's top peace negotiator U Aung Min met former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Foreign Secretary William Hague and other UK officials to discuss the on-going peace process in Burma/Myanmar. At the invitation of the British Government, President's Office Minister Aung Min and party arrived in London on 16 April and held bilateral talks focused on efforts to secure peace in Burma's ethnic minority states, where armed rebel groups have fought for decades in pursuit of greater political autonomy, and to curb a recent wave of anti-Muslim riots in central Burma and how British experts could best support the process. They also discussed strategies on improving conditions in Arakan (Rakhine) State, where more than 120,000 people were displaced due to communal violence between Buddhists and Muslims in 2012. During the visit, Minister Aung Min told the London-based BBC that his peace delegation would hold peace talks with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), after his return from Europe.<sup>3</sup>

#### **SUU KYI VISITS JAPAN**

At the invitation of the Japanese government, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi paid a visit to Japan from 12 to 19 April. During her visit, she held discussions with Japanese Premier Shinso Abe and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and urged the Japanese government to support Burma/Myanmar in its democratization reforms and the peace process with the ethnic armed

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<sup>1</sup> For successful realization of political, economic and social reforms, it needs for firm establishment of peace and stability.

Maintain successes, take lessons from losses, prepare to face and overcome challenges ahead –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 April 2013 (p. 1)

<sup>2</sup> Union Peace-making Work Committee members hold talks with representatives of KNPP –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-17-red.pdf> (NLM) 17 April 2013 (p. 9)/

KNPP has strong desire to march towards genuine peace –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/NLM-2013-04-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 April 2013 (p. 1)

<sup>3</sup> UK to Back Burma Peace Efforts –

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/32247> (Irrawaddy) 17 April 2013

groups. The Nobel Laureate also called on Crown Prince Naruhito and attended a gathering in Tokyo of Burmese citizens in Japan on April 13 and 15 and also visited a small scale hydropower plant on 14 April.<sup>4</sup>

### **BURMA ARMY, SHAN REBELS RENEW CLASHES DURING MYANMAR NEW YEAR**

On 15 and 16 April, during the Burmese/Myanmar New Year, a fierce battle broke out between Burma army and Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) at Loi Zay, Tangyan Township in northern Shan State. During the two days of fighting, 3 government infantry battalions made several assaults on the SSPP/SSA Loi Zay base. According to an SSPP officer, the government's regional command based in Lashio had given orders to wipe out all the SSPP/SSA bases stationed along the Loi Zay area. Due to the tension between Burma Army and SSPP/SSA, 431 refugees were initially camped at Aung Mangala monastery in Tangyan while 600 others have fled to surrounding towns to seek refuge.<sup>5</sup>

### **ALD OPENS TOWNSHIP OFFICE IN MAUNGDAW, RAKHINE STATE**

The Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), opened a township level office in the western border town, Maungdaw, on 10 April. The opening ceremony was held to explain the policy and the future plans of party and was attended by ALD officials and locals from Maungdaw. The ALD which won the majority of seats in the 1990 elections in the Arakan State was later announced as abolished by the military government. After the 2010 election, the party registered itself with the election commission and continued its political activities and has established 11 township level offices throughout the in the Rakhine State.<sup>6</sup>

### **KACHIN IDP PASTORS RECEIVE LEGAL TRAINING**

The three-day legal workshop for Kachin Christian pastors was held in Laiza, the de facto capital of the KIO. Christian pastors living in refugee camps located in KIO territory took part in a three-day workshop, according to conference organizers. Under the training program, attendees learned about the differences between Burma's original independence era constitution and the current controversial 2008 pro-military constitution. Participants were also briefed on the current status of Burma's legal system. The workshop also focused on ways to assist refugees and church staff to become more active in solving the country's political and ethnic problems. A total of 50 church preachers from different refugee camps and 10 students took part in the three day workshop which concluded on April 17.<sup>7</sup>

### **ANALYSIS**

President's Office Minister U Aung Min's visit to the UK to discuss the peace process is a welcome sign but it also illustrates the keen interest of superpowers including China and Japan to get involved in Burmese affairs and shape it to their liking. This is a dangerous development if the powers believe that they can use money and influence to interfere in matters they have no understanding of. The Burmese New Year has also witnessed the ushering in of both positive and negative developments in

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<sup>4</sup> Suu Kyi calls for Japanese support for Myanmar's democratization – <http://elevenmyanmar.com/politics/3150-suu-kyi-calls-for-japanese-support-for-myanmar-s-democratization> (Eleven News Media) 18 April 2013/  
Suu Kyi returns from Japan –

<http://elevenmyanmar.com/politics/3170-suu-kyi-returns-from-japan> (Eleven News Media) 20 April 2013

<sup>5</sup> Burma army, Shan rebels renew clashes during Myanmar New Year – [http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5362:burma-army-shan-rebels-renew-clashes-during-myanmar-new-year&catid=86:war&Itemid=284](http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5362:burma-army-shan-rebels-renew-clashes-during-myanmar-new-year&catid=86:war&Itemid=284) (S.H.A.N.) 17 April 2013

<sup>6</sup> ALD opens township office in a western border town of Arakan – <http://www.narinjara.com/main/index.php/ald-opens-township-office-in-a-western-border-town-of-arakan/> (Narinjara) 15 April 2013

<sup>7</sup> Kachin IDP pastors receive legal training – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2507-kachin-idp-pastors-receive-legal-training.html> (KNG) 19 April 2013

Myanmar's path to democratization. From a positive perspective, the meeting between the government's peace-making committee and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) can be seen as a step in the right direction while the reoccurrence of fighting with the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) is a step in the opposite direction. This once again highlights the need for both the government and ethnic armed groups to abide by and implement the terms of their ceasefire agreements. Otherwise, the President's desire for national solidarity and peace will not be achieved.