

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.2

OFFICIAL MEDIA

32nd BURMA-THAI TOWNSHIP BORDER COMMITTEE HOLDS MEETING

The 32nd Burma-Thai Township Border Committee meeting was held at the Heritage Grand Convention in Ronong of Thailand on 9 January. Discussions at the meeting were focused on social affairs, health, border crossing, human trafficking, narcotic drug and rule of law that occurred in Kawthoung District in Burma and Ranong District in Thailand.¹

MEASURES TAKEN FOR PEACE, STABILITY IN RAKHINE STATE

Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee for Implementing Peace, Stability and Development Tasks in Rakhine State Minister Lt-Gen Thet Naing Win, Rakhine State Chief Minister Hla Maung Tin and UNICEF Resident Representative Bertrand Bainvel discussed matters related to measures being implemented for the rule of law and development of the region at the Rakhine State Government office in Sittway on 9 January. They also met local people from Myebon and visited camps for internally displaced people in Kantha, Taungpaw and Sittway and the training school for youths on 11 January.²

BURMA'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HOLDS EDUCATIVE TALKS

Members of the Burmese National Human Rights Commission gave a briefing on human rights and matters related to Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Zwegabin Hall in Hpa-an of Kayin State on 10 January. Members of the commission gave talks on human rights, formation and aims of the commissions; emergence and provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also issues regarding discussed complaints sent to the commission. The briefing was attended by Kayin State Chief Minister Zaw Min, Speaker of State Hluttaw Saw Aung Kyaw Min, the chief justice of the State High Court, the deputy speaker, state ministers, the advocate-general of the state, the auditor-general of the state, State Hluttaw MPs and departmental officials and locals.³

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 1st day meeting on 13 January. At the opening session, the Speaker **praised MPs for implementation of development tasks with the use of development funds in cooperation with respective organizations and called for the systematic use of allotted development funds in accord with the directives. The following issues were also raised and discussed:**

- U Aung Zin of Pazundaung Constituency raised the question on **peaceful assembly and peaceful procession** and Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Zan Myint replied that **those wishing to undertake peaceful procession would not get the green light due to belated applications and security concerns. But they can lodge an appeal to the respective Region Police Force Commanders within seven days and that the Region Police Force Commander can deny or allow it within 14 days from the day he received it after taking the approval from the commissioner of the General Administration Department. Under the Constitution, the applicants will have chance to lodge an appeal;**

¹ 32nd Myanmar-Thai Township Border Committee holds meeting – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 January 2014 (p. 2)

² Measures taken for peace, stability in Rakhine State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 January 2014 (p.16)

³ MNHRC holds educative talks about human rights – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 January 2014 (p.10)

- The Bill Committee read out its report on the National Races Rights Protection Bill.⁴

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 2nd day meeting on 16 January. At the session the following issues were discussed;

- Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development, Dr Daw Khin San Yi briefed the session on the investment in Burma and said that, **a total of 25 countries had invested in 381 businesses in 11 sectors, amounting US\$ 34200.002 million from 1988-89 to 1 December 2013.** She also added that **a total of 305,214 job opportunities have been created for the people from 1988 to 31-12-2013;**
- The Bill Committee submitted the report on findings of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Development Fund Bill.⁵

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 2nd day meeting on 16 January. At today's Hluttaw session, four questions were answered, two reports submitted and one proposal approved. Key issues included the following;

- MP Dr Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No (8) raised the question **on whether there is a plan or not to export SME products to foreign countries.** In responding, Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Daw Le Le Thein said that, **SMEs in the country are in operation in accord with Private Industrial Enterprise Law enacted in 1990 and enactment of SMEs Development Bill (draft) is underway;**
- U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency No (6) submitted a proposal **urging the Union government to formulate pragmatic forestry law for sustainable development of Permanent Forest Estate – PFE which is abundant with forest ecosystem and biodiversity** and five Hluttaw representatives took part in discussions. Deputy Minister U Aye Myint Maung responded that **Burma is implementing work projects to protect the forests in corporation with UN agencies, international organizations, US and Japan. He continued that administration tasks for sustainable development of forest resources will be undertaken with participation of relevant ministries, local administration body, local people, NGOs and INGOs.** The session approved the proposal for further discussion.⁶

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 1st day meeting on 13 January. Speaker Thura Shwe Mann in his opening speech stated that **parliament is responsible for granting equal rights and self-determination to the ethnic people in the multiethnic nation; he stressed the need for appropriate management of the budget; convincing the people to voluntarily pay taxes and pressed for fair taxation practices,** He also stated that **the National Plan for 2014-2015 Fiscal Year, the National Budget for 2014-2015 Fiscal Year would be submitted by the government during the session and the government would also put forward a taxation bill to the parliament.** Regarding the constitutional reforms, the Speaker said the law would be amended to suit the social and economic needs of the country under law. The following bills were submitted and discussed by officials concerned;

⁴ Parliament responsible to fulfill hopes of people: Thura U Shwe Mann. Pyidaungsu, Pyithu, Amyotha Hluttaws resume – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 January 2014 (p.16 & 9)

⁵ Over US\$ 34200 million of foreign investment flow into 11 sectors – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2014 (p.16)

⁶ Enactment of SMEs Development Bill (draft) underway – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 January 2014 (p.16 & 9)

- Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw submitted the National Plan for 2014-2015 Fiscal Year;
- Minister for Finance U Win Shein submitted the Bill Amending Myanmar Stamp Law, Bill Amending Myanmar Tariff Law, Bill Amending Income Tax Law and Bill Amending the Office Tax Law. ⁷

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 2nd day meeting on 14 January. The following issues were raised, approved and discussed;

- The session **confirmed the appointments of Rakhine State Chief Justice and the Deputy Electric Power Minister;**
- The Hluttaw also **approved the formation of Joint Planning and Budget Development Committee with U Soe Tha of Twantay Constituency as the chairman, U Myo Myint of Mandalay Region Constituency (6) and U Aye Mauk of Mahlaing Constituency as Secretary;**
- Transport Minister U Nyan Tun Aung, Electric Power Minister U Khin Maung Soe, Industry Minister U Maung Myint, Deputy Rail Transportation Minister U Myint Thein, Deputy Environmental Conservation and Forestry Minister U Aye Myint Maung made clarifications on budgets requested for activities of each ministry in 2014-2015 Fiscal Year. ⁸

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 3rd day meeting on 15 January. The following issues were raised, approved and discussed;

- Ministers for Information U Aung Kyi, Minister for Culture U Aye Myint Kyu and Minister for Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Daw Myat Myat Ohn Khin gave briefings and updates on works and activities being implemented by their respective ministries including the establishment of International Broadcasting Centre; construction of Fine Arts College in Nyaungshwe of Shan State and an Early Child Care and All round Development Main Centre in Sittway, Rakhine State. ⁹

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HPA-AN PEACE TALKS POSTPONED UNTIL FEBRUARY

A conference between Burma's ethnic armed groups and government peace-making negotiators has been postponed until February, according to a member of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT).

The conference was set to take place in Karen State capital Hpa-an in January, but has twice been postponed. The meeting is part of an on-going series of peace conferences geared towards securing a nationwide ceasefire between Burma's armed forces and ethnic militias.

Leaders of ethnic armed groups are scheduled to convene – without government mediators – from 20 to 22 January at Lay Wah, the headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU). Representatives of the NCCT told local news media that more time is needed to “discuss things amongst themselves.”

“We requested that the government postpone the meeting,” said Kwe Htoo Win, NCCT deputy-chairman and general-secretary of the KNU. “We needed a little bit of time for this, so that we can see positive outcomes in the Hpa-an talks.”

⁷ Parliament responsible to fulfill hopes of people: Thura U Shwe Mann. Pyidaungsu, Pyithu, Amyotha Hluttaws resume – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 January 2014 (p.16 & 9)

⁸ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw budget hearing starts – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 January 2014 (p. 16)

⁹ Culture Ministry to build Fine Arts College in Nyaungshwe of Shan State – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-01-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 January 2014 (p.16 & 9)

The Hpa-an talks will proceed after the Lay Wah conference draws to a close. Kwe Htoo Win also said that the NCCT is considering inviting opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to attend the Hpa-an talks as an observer.¹⁰

SHAN ARMY FORMS ELECTION COMMISSION

A 7-man election commission has been formed by the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA)'s recently concluded annual meeting for the purpose of choosing a successor to the incumbent leader Lt-Gen Yawdserk, according to adviser Peun Kham.

The EC's chairman is Maj Awng Moeng and vice chairman Maj Lao Hseng, the movement's spokesman. It was formed on Monday, 13 January, the last day of the meeting. Apart from the incumbent vice chairmen, Maj Gen Sai Yi and Col Kherh Ngeun, two commanders Brig Gen Pawng Kherh and Lt-Col Gawn Zeun, commander of the Kengtung sector are also included in the election commission.

"Sao Yawdserk has requested that the new chairman be chosen from lieutenant-colonels upwards and he himself not to be included among the nominees," Peun Kham explained. There are 10 officers who hold the rank of lieutenant colonels and upwards in the RCSS/SSA's operational areas, according to an SSA senior officer. "Others are less at home with political issues than the said two," he said. "They are also well-received among the group's brass."

Yawdserk meanwhile says his stepping down doesn't mean he is leaving the armed struggle he had led for 18 years. "But I would like to be sure that the cause will be able to move forward without me at the helm," he told SHAN last Saturday. "For this purpose, I would be happy to serve as a counsel to the new leader." The election is due to be held in mid-February.

Yawdserk also urged his commanders to strictly adhere to the decisions of the RCSS/SSA's previous bi-annual and annual meetings. Among them are:

- Until the termination of peace talks, the SSA will continue to exercise constant vigilance
- There will be no conscription at present. Enlistment in the SSA will be on a voluntary basis.
- Tax will be imposed on big businesses. Small companies and the people will be exempted.
- Members are prohibited from engaging in the drug trade.¹¹

KAYAN OBJECT TO DESIGNATION IN PLANNED CENSUS

Members of the Kayan ethnic group have objected to being described as a sub-group of the Kayah in the forthcoming national census, saying the designation is degrading. The objection was outlined in a statement issued by seven Kayan organisations on 11 January.

"The Kayan are a separate ethnic group and we are not subordinate to the Kayah," said Colonel Saw Lwin, the joint secretary (1) of the Kayan New Land Party. "By categorizing us in this way the government has created dissension; it is as if our ethnic group is regarded as small and unimportant," Col Saw Lwin said. The statement said it was degrading for the Kayan to be considered subordinate to the Kayah and for the Kayan to not be considered as one of the country's main ethnic groups.

As well as the Kayan New Land Party, the statement was issued by the Kayan National Party, Karenni National Progressive Party, Kayan Literature and Culture Committee, Kayan New Generation Youth

¹⁰ Hpa-an peace talks postponed until February –
<http://english.dvb.no/news/hpa-an-peace-talks-burma-myanmar/36112> (DVB) 16 January 2014

¹¹ Shan army forms election commission –
http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5692:shan-army-forms-election-commission&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) 16 January 2014

Organization, Kayan National Defence Army and groups representing Kayan women's organizations. The Kayan affairs minister in the Shan State government also signed the statement.

It said the census had listed four Kayan ethnic groups, which had each been given its own code number for the population survey. It requested that they be listed as one Kayan ethnic group and be given one code number, 203. The Kayan groups said they planned to make their objections known by writing to the Office of the President, the Ministry of Immigration and Population, the Union Parliament's ethnic affairs committee and the relevant state government cabinets.

The census, due to be held in March and April and the first in Burma in 31 years, has attracted criticism from many ethnic groups.¹²

BURMA ARMY VIOLATES CEASEFIRE

Government troops fired artillery shells into Karen village areas in Northern Papun Township, but no villagers were injured in the shelling, said KNU sources.

On January 7, Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No.401 fired at least three artillery shells into civilian areas in Northern Papun Township, KNU sources from Papun District. The recent skirmish is a yet another violation of the ceasefire agreement reached between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese Government in 2012. KNU sources claim that this was the second incident in as many days.

The KNU sources said that the day before the Burma Army shelling, fighting broke out between Government troops and military units under KNLA 5th Brigade after Government troops advanced into KNLA areas. There were no casualties in either incident.

KNU sources confirmed that LIB No. 401, under the control of Military Operations Command No.8, fired 60mm artillery shells into the Boe Plaw village area in the afternoon and that government troops fired shells to scare villagers away and clear the route for the transportation of military supplies to a nearby army base.

"Currently, the Government troops are clearing the routes for their rations transportation. It was the security forces who were deployed to overlook the rations transportation that fired the artillery shells just before the road construction vehicles went through," said P' Doh Saw Lweh Gay, Joint Secretary of KNU in Papun District. P'Doh Saw Lweh Gay said it was obvious that the shelling are tactics to provoke a reaction from the KNLA.

P'Doh Saw Thaw Thi Bwe, the KNU Joint Secretary, told local news media that an official complaint has been submitted by KNU Brigade (5) to its Headquarter. "As we have received official complaint from 5th Brigade, I have met with Major Kler Doh [of the KNLA's 5th Brigade] and discussed about the issue." These incidents are not isolated. In June 2013 military jets fired live ammunition in Taungoo District the KNU's Brigade (2) as what was described at the time as "jet bomber training". Regional military sources claim these incidents are tactics to provoke Karen soldiers into retaliation.

The current ceasefire agreement, signed between the KNU and the Government at Hpa-An, Karen State, in January 12, 2012, has been largely adhered to but sporadic fighting still breaks out between the KNU forces and Government troops.¹³

¹² Kayan object to designation in planned census – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/ethnic-issues/item/10812-kayan-object-to-designation-in-planned-census> (Mizzima) 13 January 2014

¹³ Burma army violates ceasefire – <http://karennews.org/2014/01/burma-army-violates-ceasefire.html/> (Karen News) 14 January 2014

BURMESE MILITARY APPOINTS WOMEN MPS

The Burmese military has appointed two female officers for the first time as representatives in parliament.

According to an announcement by the Union Election Commission 10 January, the military replaced four of its representatives in the lower house with new officers who were nominated by the commander-in-chief, two of whom are women: Lt-Col Soe Soe Myint and Lt-Col San Thida Khin.

Ye Htun, a Lower house MP from Shan State, said the two are the first women ever appointed by the military as representatives in the parliament.

A female representative in the Lower house for the National League for Democracy, Phyu Phyu Thin, said, "Whether it's men or women, when there is democratic change in the parliamentary politics, I want it to be only because the people will it."

According to the 2008 constitution, the Burmese armed forces are allocated 25 per cent of seats in both houses of parliament. These MPs are unelected and can be rotated at the discretion of the commander-in-chief.¹⁴

USDP LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO RECRUIT YOUTH MEMBERS

The governing Union Solidarity and Development Party has launched a campaign to attract more young members as part of a move to make it more appealing to the younger generation. The party held a youth forum in Yangon on 12 January as part of its campaign to attract more members aged between 18 and 30.

"We want to encourage the younger generation to participate in the election [in 2015]," said, Thar Win, a USDP central committee member. "If their qualifications are outstanding, we will support them to be nominated as candidates for election," Thar Win said.

In Yangon Region, two-thirds of the USDP membership, or about 700 young people, are registered party members, an average of about 15 members at each township level branch. The party wanted to have at least 30 young members in each branch, Thar Win said.¹⁵

USDP ACCUSED OF FORCIBLY RECRUITING MEMBERS IN SAGAING

Many residents of Ayadaw Township in Sagaing Division claim they were forcibly recruited for the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) by local civil servants when they applied for citizen identification cards.

Several Ayadaw locals said they were "duped" by local authorities who issued them USDP membership cards when they only applied for citizenship IDs.

"I applied for an ID card, but the officials presented me with a USDP membership – they insisted I keep the card even when I tried to give it back to them," said Thawka Aung, who said he unwittingly became a member of the USDP, along with about 30 other people in his village who had the same experience.

On 11 January, the opposition National League for Democracy local supporters demanded action be taken against the local government staff who were involved and the USDP. The NLD's Township

¹⁴ Burmese military appoints two women MPs –

<http://english.dvb.no/news/burmese-military-appoints-two-women-mps-burma-myanmar/36006> (DVB) 13 January 2014

¹⁵ USDP launches campaign to recruit more young members –

<http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/10816-usdp-launches-campaign-for-more-young-members> (Mizzima)

14 January 2014

Information Coordinator Zaw Win said 167 villagers in the area had come forward with claims that they had been forcibly recruited to the USDP.

“The villagers claimed they never applied for USDP membership and that the signatures on the cards were forged,” said Zaw Win. “We would like to know why the local authorities did this – and whether they were ordered to do so.”

Khin Maung Thein, the township chairman of the NLD in Ayadaw, said residents in about half of all villages in the township have reported similar experiences with authorities coercing them to accept USDP membership cards or else forfeit the chance to apply for citizenship ID cards.¹⁶

NUP TO ENCOURAGE FEMALE CANDIDATES

The National Unity Party (NUP) wants female candidates to stand in more than half of Burma’s 330 constituencies in the 2015 election, says a member of its central executive committee. Tun Yi told local news media on January 15 that the party will encourage women to compete for nominations in at least 189 constituencies.

The NUP aims to have at least one female candidate in each of the constituencies. Each constituency in Burma returns four MPs: one each for the upper and lower houses of the Union parliament, and two for regional or state assemblies. The NUP’s election strategy divides Burma’s 330 constituencies into two categories. The first, comprising 108 constituencies are those in which the party will compete for all four seats in 2015.

In the second category, involving 81 constituencies, the NUP will contest only some races. “We have asked each and every level of our party to fully support this initiative, so that female and youth candidates can take part in the election,” said Tun Yi. His comments follow decisions reached at the NUP’s central executive committee meeting in Yangon on January 14 and 15. The party’s executive meets every six months.

The NUP is the latest political party to develop a strategy to promote female and youth participation in the political process. The governing Union Solidarity and Development Party and National League for Democracy have unveiled similar campaigns.

The NUP ran candidates in all 330 electorates in the 2010 election, winning five seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw, 12 in the Pyithu Hluttaw, and 47 in state and regional assemblies.¹⁷

88 ACTIVIST URGES UNITY AHEAD OF 2015 ELECTION

Activist Min Ko Naing from the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society said that the public should join hands to strengthen citizens’ rights ahead of the 2015 elections. Min Ko Naing was addressing a plenary session of the silver jubilee of the 1988 student uprising, known popularly as 8888, held in Yangon on January 11. He warned that the elections could result in a difficult situation for the country. “We must make strenuous efforts to cultivate the same spirit to work closely together with all democratic forces and ethnic groups to encourage democratic values and citizens’ rights,” said Min Ko Naing.

The ex-political prisoner added that before 2015 much needed to be done to address sensitive issues. Many activists have raised concerns that there could be a turning point to the current reforms and have urged people to remain united in the face of the challenges ahead. “While we were in jail, someone asked what words we want to leave behind. We have always had one answer,

¹⁶ USDP accused of forcibly recruiting members in Sagaing Region – <http://english.dvb.no/uncategorized/usdp-accused-of-forcibly-recruiting-members-in-sagaing/36127> (DVB) 16 January 2014

¹⁷ NUP to encourage female candidates – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/politics/item/10822-nup-to-encourage-female-candidates> (Mizzima) 17 January 2014

that is: grip your fist firmly. If we are not united, we will not reach our goal," said Min Ko Naing. Among the issues at hand are reaching a genuine peace with ethnic armed groups. Disagreements between the government and ethnic armed groups have perpetuated a crisis that is not going to make the upcoming elections easy, added Min Ko Naing.¹⁸

ANALYSIS

The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)'s appeal to recruit young members and the National Unity Party (NUP)'s desire to field women candidates in the upcoming elections, are indications of mind-set changes taking shape in Burma regarding politics. Furthermore, the recent appointments in parliament of two female military MPs can also be seen as a shift not only within the military ranks but more importantly providing a platform for the participation of women in day to day politics. While such positive steps are taking place in the political arena, the sensitive and contentious peace process has been marred by news of further clashes between government forces and military units under KNLA 5th Brigade in Northern Papun Township, Karen State. Time and again, the need to monitor cease-fire agreements have been called for but to date have yet to be implemented. And until such mechanisms are put in place, similar clashes will no doubt occur and could destabilize the government's on-going peace initiative.

¹⁸ 88 activist urges united ahead of 2015 election – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4714:88-activist-urges-unity-ahead-of-2015-elections&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 14 January 2014