

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.3

OFFICIAL MEDIA

GERMAN PRESIDENT GAUCK MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT TO BURMA

German President Joachim Gauck arrived in Burma on 9 February to begin his official visit to the country and the first by a German leader in 26 years since Richard von Weizsäcker's goodwill visit in 1986.

The German President called on Burmese President Thein Sein on 10 February and discussed the successes and challenges in carrying out democratic reforms in Burma, strengthening friendship and cooperation between the two countries, the promotion of trade and investment, peace building, stability and development of Rakhine State and development of SMEs sector. The two presidents also attended the signing ceremony on the Reduction and Rescheduling of the Foreign Debt owed by the Burmese government. The Agreed Minutes on the Treatment of Debt of Burma was signed between Burma's Finance Minister Win Shein and Paris Club member countries on 23 January 2013 in Paris, France. According to the agreement, debt clearance volume is over Euro 1,084 million. Of that, 50 % of debt was cancelled by Germany. Over Euro 543 million of the remaining 50 % debt is to be repaid by Burma with a 3 % of the interest rate within 15 years—including a 7 year pending period and 8 year repayment period.

During his visit, President Gauck inaugurated the first German Goethe Institute and attended the Burma-Germany business forum, after which he officially opened the German Industry and Commerce (AHK) office to Burma. The German President also gave a speech at Yangon University and held meetings with Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann and Chairperson of Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquillity Committee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.¹

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 13th day meeting on 11 February. The following issues and questions were raised on discussed:

- **Minister for Mines Dr Myint Aung** said that the ministry was **seeking approvals from the Myanmar Investment Commission and the cabinet meetings to issue permits for mineral explorations in regions and states. The Minister continued by saying that, entrepreneurs must submit the endorsements of the respective region and state governments. In Kayin State, the ministry earned over K 1300 million as tax from issuance of permits for mining**

¹ German President and party visit Shwedagon Pagoda –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-10-red.pdf> (NLM) 10 February 2014 (p.1)

President U Thein Sein, wife Daw Khin Khin Win welcomes German President –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2014 (p.16 & 9)/

German President opens Myanmar branch of Delegation of German Industry and Commerce –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 February 2014 (p.9)/

Myanmar thanks Germany for its rightful stand against intense pressures from some Western countries on Myanmar in the past 20 years: President U Thein Sein. Germany wants to assist Myanmar making great strides in sweeping reforms opened a new page in the history of Myanmar: President Mr Joachim Gauck –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2014 (p.1 & 8)/

Cooperation taking place in Parliament comprising representatives from different political parties –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2014 (p.16 & 9)/

Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquillity Committee Chairperson meets with German President –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2014 (p.9)

industry. The mining companies provide assistance to social, health, education and religious affairs to the local people residing near the mining blocks, he added;

- The Pyithu Hluttaw also sought the **approval for the Electronic Bill** sent back by the Amyotha Hluttaw without any amendment and the **Associations Registration Bill** submitted by the Public Affairs Administration Committee;
- The session approved the appointment of Daw Mya Mya Win, Professor Dean (Rtd) and Daw Le Le Win, Assistant Lecturer (Rtd) as **members of the Pyithu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission.**²

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 13th day meeting on 11 February. The following issues were raised and answered during the session;

- Deputy Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Htin Aung briefed the session and said that **the Ministry had assigned Labour Attaches in Republic of Korea, Thailand and Malaysia for protection of Burmese workers in the respective countries.** The Minister also said that, **action would be taken against those employment agencies which failed to protect the rights of Burmese workers abroad;**
- The Amyotha Hluttaw also **approved the Money Laundering Bill and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Development Fund Bill;**
- Defence Services Personnel Amyotha Hluttaw Representative Major Myint Sein read **the report 1/2014 on progress of tasks in Chin and Rakhine States and social, health and education sectors presented by Amyotha Hluttaw Relief and Victims Care Committee.**³

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 9th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) held its 12th day meeting on 10 February. The following issues were raised and answered during the session;

- the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker announced **the appointment of Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Daw Khin San Yi** as the nominee of the President to the post of Union Education Minister;
- Hluttaw representatives held **discussions on the proposed planning of the government shown at the appendix-2 (a) of the National Planning Bill for 2014-2015 FY;**
- MP Daw Khin Thanda of Tada-U Constituency **urged the Ministry of Health to put much-needed plans in the Bill as adequate health care service is desperately needed across the country. She also stressed the need to support the sports ground in the townships by cancelling or halving the proposed budget of K 9968.200 million for Wunna Theikdi sports complex;**
- MP Tin Win of Kawlin Constituency **raised the question on the allocation of budget to under-construction schools as it is not mentioned in the Bill. He also discussed the budget allocation for construction of staff quarters for health staff in Kawlin Township. In responding to the questions raised, the Speaker called for coordination and collaboration between the representatives and respective committees.**⁴

² Arrangements being made for winners in entrance exams to have opportunities to attend B. Tech, BE – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 February 2014 (p.9)

³ Arrangements being made for winners in entrance exams to have opportunities to attend B. Tech, BE – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 February 2014 (p.9)

⁴ Deputy NPED Minister nominated as Union Minister for Education – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs17/NLM2014-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2014 (p. 8)

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

WOMEN URGED TO TAKE PART IN PEACE PROCESS

The government's chief peace negotiator, Minister Aung Min, suggested that women's involvement in the ongoing peace process will be on the agenda during upcoming negotiations.

The Minister said that future meetings with ethnic armed groups, geared towards achieving a nationwide ceasefire and long term political settlements, will devote some attention to the as yet near total absence of female voices in the historic discussions.

The Thailand-based Women's League of Burma (WLB), an umbrella group of 13 women's rights organisations, welcomed the minister's remarks. However, the WLB asserted that women who take part in the peace process should be individuals who truly represent women in the country. The Minister's comments were also welcomed by the WLB, the 88 Generation Peace & Open Society group and Rakhine [Arakan] Women's Union.

Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) committee member Hkun Okker believes that the participation of women would lead to more successful negotiations. However, he suggested that the presence of women in future meetings is dependent on the decisions of individual groups and who they appoint to attend the meeting. "All we can do is to urge the groups to appoint female representatives to the meetings. Whether they do or not is only up to them," said Hkun Okker.⁵

BURMA ARMY CAPTURES POSTS NEAR KIO'S LAIZA CAPITAL

Two frontline posts controlled by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) that served as protection for the group's Laiza headquarters were seized by government troops after heavy clashes on 11 and 12 February. Ja Ing Yang and Hka-U, both posts held by KIA Battalion 18 under the group's 5th Brigade, were attacked and then captured by the Burmese Army, according to KIA frontline officers who declined to be named.

The KIA soldiers withdrew from Hka-U post after a column from the Burma Army's Light Infantry Division No. 99 attacked their post with small arms and artillery on 12 February, said Dumsa Dau Hka, a spokesperson for the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)'s Technical Advisory Team office based in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.

On 11 February, a combined battalion of government troops captured Ja Ing Yang post after they clashed with troops from KIA battalion 18 and its militia MHH (Mungshawa Hpyen Hpung) for several hours. Troops from Infantry Battalion (IB) No. 261, Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 421, LIB No. 424, LIB No. 425 and LIB No. 426 under Military Operation Command (MOC) No. 7 participated in the military's attack on the two posts, according to KIA frontline officers.

Recently, two KIA posts located in the group's 3rd Brigade in Bhamo (or) Manmaw district in southern Kachin State were also captured by government troops.

Dau Hka told local news media that the Technical Advisory Team informed the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) on clashes and that the fighting would intensify if the KIA resisted the Burmese Army. "Heavy fighting will break out again if the KIA resists government troops. So far there have been no big clashes because the KIA withdrew from their posts," Dau Hka said.

⁵ Women urged to take part in peace process – <http://english.dvb.no/news/women-urged-to-take-part-in-peace-process-burma-myanmar/37141> (DVB) 12 February 2014

Meanwhile, the government appears to be sending more troops to reinforce positions near the KIA's Laiza headquarters. More government troops are also being sent to the KIA Battalion 12 area in Mansi (or Manje) Township in southern Kachin state from Bhamo.⁶

LIMITING ETHNICS TO 135 GROUPS HARMS PEACE PROCESS – KACHIN SOCIAL ORGS

Twenty-three Kachin social organisations have sent letters to President Thein Sein and Union Assembly Speaker Thura Shwe Mann demanding the postponement of a census to be taken from 23 March to 10 April 2014.

The organizations say that a census that only canvasses from the government's designated 135 ethnic groups cannot be accurate. There is no particular tribe known as "ethnic Kachin," they point out: the race combining all the groups is ethnic Kachin.

"If the government accepts 135 ethnic groups only, it can cause harm to the peace process because ethnic groups can get into armed conflicts if disagreements arise among them," said Khun Jar of the Kachin Peace Network.

"Until now, the government and the ethnic groups are still trying to reach an immediate ceasefire. Unless the census results include everyone, it will be hard to achieve that."

The other factor is the 2015 election. As the ceasefire agreement has not been signed yet, it will not be easy to conduct an accurate census in conflict zones and KIO-controlled areas, the Kachin organizations said.

"We can't anticipate who will conduct the census in remote areas and places where there is no ceasefire. In some places there are no schools. Teachers are normally used to collect data on the population. So with no schools, it will not be easy to collect population figures at the refugee camps," said Daw Khun Jar.

The ethnic groups are planning to hold a ceremony to clarify the census on 17 February and it is expected that Kachin, Mon, Kayin, Chin, Shan and other ethnics are likely to attend. Taking a nationwide census requires a lot of time, the groups said.

The Kachin organisations also sent letters to the minister for Immigration and Population, the chief minister of Kachin State, the Kachin parliament, representatives of the United Nations Population Fund, donor organisations and the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society.⁷

CNP RENAMED CHIN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Union Election Commission of Burma has granted the Chin National Party (CNP) permission to change its name to the Chin National Democratic Party (CNDP).

The UEC said in its announcement on Thursday that the Chin political party was officially renamed as of 5 February 2014 after having been scrutinized in conformity with the law. Salai Ceu Bik Thawng, General Secretary said, "We will call a Central Committee meeting to discuss our leadership issues as well as reshuffling of the CEC." He also said that a party conference would be held in order to promote Chin national interests rather than personal or party interests.

Salai Myo Chit, Secretary-III, commented that they would start travelling soon to different areas including Chin State, Arakan State and Sagaing Region to focus on the party's campaign.

⁶ Burma army captures posts near KIO's Laiza capital – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2631-burma-army-captures-posts-near-kio-s-laiza-capital.html> (KNG) 13 February 2014

⁷ Limiting ethnics to 135 groups harms peace process – Kachin social orgs – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5019:limiting-ethnics-to-135-groups-harms-peace-process-kachin-social-orgs&catid=44:national&Itemid=384

The party came up with the new name after its initial application submitted on 30 November 2013 under the name of 'Chin National Progressive Party' was opposed. Both CNP and CPP had made attempts to merge into a single political party ahead of the upcoming 2015 General Election.⁸

MON NATIONAL PARTY OFFICIALLY REGISTERS NAME

The former Mon Democracy Party (MDP) and members which broke away from the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP) has officially been registered the Mon National Party (MNP) according to an announcement by the Election Commission on 11 February.

Final decisions were made for the new party at MDP's recent executive committee meeting in Moulmein. It was confirmed the new party would be formed to accommodate AMDP members that left their party to join forces in contesting the 2015 elections.

"Because there is no path for two Mon political parties to walk directly together, we (MDP) will change our party name. For some members of AMDP that want to unite, we will just unify with this new party name. The election commission has also suggested it's the best way," said Nai Soe Myint, former member of the MDP executive committee.

Twenty-one party executive committee members signed the agreement including Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein. Senior members, Nai Soe Myint and Nai Layie Tamarh, were present during the official procedure in Burma's capital.

The former 21 MDP executive members were led by former Party Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein, First Vice-Chairman Nai Tet Lwin, Second Vice Chairman Nai Tin Aung, General Secretary Dr. Min Soe Linn, First Joint Secretary Dr. Min Kyi Win, and Second Joint Secretary Mon Yarzar. The former AMDP members were led by Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein, Secretary Nai Ouksar, First Joint Secretary Nai Tin Lwin, and Second Joint Secretary Nai Saw Non.⁹

88 GENERATION GROUP CALLS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Members of the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society Group, including activists Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, have called for a nation-wide federal conference to be held in support of constitutional reforms and success peaceful elections in 2015.

In addressing a packed press conference on 13 February, Min Ko Naing said, "A federal conference is needed to think of ways to amend the 2008 Constitution. Our political process must include amending the constitution."

"We will seek public opinion as to how this conference should be, who should attend, and how to make decision on behalf of the people who have committed themselves to this country, as well as the organisations and people that have the important political positions," he added.

"The rules and regulations of the 2008 Constitution are the same as those of 1974 constitution," explained fellow activist and former political prisoner Ko Ko Gyi, referring to Burma's first military-drafted constitution. "If we want to make some amendments, we need the agreement from more than 75 percent of MP's. And then more than half of eligible voters need to support the idea in public opinion poll," he added.

"The current political situation in Myanmar is very sensitive. The country is facing difficulties to amend the constitution. If we want to see stability and want to overcome these difficulties, we have

⁸ CNP renamed Chin National Democratic Party – <http://chinlandguardian.com/index.php/chin-news/item/2102-cnp-renamed-chin-national-democratic-party> (Chinland Guardian) 8 February 2014

⁹ Mon National Party officially registers name – <http://monnews.org/2014/02/13/mon-national-party-officially-registers-name/> (IMNA) 13 February 2014

to overcome these restrictions and obstacles ourselves,” said Ko Ko Gyi. The 88 Generation are seeking support from the political organisations, as well as the government, parliament, and the army to amend the 2008 Constitution ahead of 2015.¹⁰

FIVE DETAINED OVER CHEMICAL WEAPONS REPORTS

Five staff from the weekly journal Unity were detained and charged under the state secrets act over their reporting of an alleged military-run chemical weapons factory in Magwe’s Pauk Township.

Unity Journal CEO Tin San and four journalists were arrested on 31 January and 1 February for allegedly breaching the 1923 Burma State Secrets Act. In its 23 and 30 January issues the journal had published a series of investigative reports alleging the military had seized more than 3000 acres of farmland in Pauk Township, Magwe Region, and constructed a weapons factory on the site. Unity reported that the factory was producing chemical weapons, although an official from the factory was quoted as denying this in the January 30 issue.

On 4 February the case was sent to the interim Burmese Press Council, which issued a strongly-worded statement urging organisations engaged in a dispute with journalists to negotiate before taking legal action. The council said that because proposed press laws have not yet been enacted any complaint involving journalists should be dealt with fairly and in line with democratic principles.

Several Myanmar-based journalist advocacy groups released a joint statement criticising the government’s decision to hold the journalists for more than 24 hours without due cause.

Speaking to local news media, Presidential spokesperson Ye Htut dismissed the allegations of wrongful procedure and said the Ministry of Defence had received the correct paperwork from the court to make the arrests and to continue detention.¹¹

ANALYSIS

The visit of the German President Gauck to Burma, the first by a German leader in 26 years, is yet another sign of recognition by the international community towards the democratic reform process taking place in the country. The easing of Burmese debt, and the opening of the German trade office as well as the Goethe Institute can be seen as the Germans taking a foot-hole inside the country and possibly seeking to compete with China and Japan.

Burma’s democratization and national reconciliation process on the other hand, has once again been marred by the recent outbreaks of fighting in Kachin State between government troops and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). While peace talks are entering an important juncture, the recent clashes will not have been welcomed and can only prove to be detrimental to the peace process. Furthermore, continued fighting will not help to promote trust between the government and ethnic armed groups, which highlights the importance and need to establish ceasefire monitoring systems and a code of conduct. Under the present circumstances, a code of conduct can help to build trust between the conflicting parties and prevent future outbreaks of fighting. Until such mechanisms can be implemented, it is more than likely that clashes will continue. Therefore, it is imperative that in future peace talks both the government (including the military) and ethnic armed groups should not only consider cease-fire agreements but more importantly find a solution to achieve genuine and sustainable peace.

¹⁰ 88 Generation Group calls for constitutional reform – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5057:88-generation-group-call-for-constitutional-reform&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 14 February 2014

¹¹ Five detained over chemical weapons reports – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/9521-five-detained-over-unity-article.html> (Myanmar Times) 9 February 2014