

POLITICAL MONITOR No.3

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PYITHU HLUTTAW (LOWER HOUSE) SESSIONS

The First regular session of the Second Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) was convened in Nay Pyi Taw on 1 February, electing MP Win Myint (National League for Democracy) from Tamwe Constituency as Speaker and T Khun Myat (Union Solidarity and Development Party) from Kutkai Constituency as Deputy Speaker. Following a formal transfer of duties and an oath-taking ceremony, newly elected Speaker Win Myint extended greetings, hailing the day as ‘Myanmar’s historic day, which brings pride to the democratic transition’. He also pledged to strive, without corruption, in conformity with parliamentary laws, rules and regulations, to create democratic opportunities in the country. The Speaker also urged MPs to bring honour to the country by observing rules, regulations and disciplines related to the parliament, highlighting a well-known saying that says a lawmaker should not be a man who breaks the law.¹

The **Second Day** of first regular session in Nay Pyi Taw, with discussions for the formation of its Bill Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw Win Myint submitted nominations for the Bill Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to the parliament. Tun Aung (a) Tun Tun Hein (National League for Democracy) of Nawngkhio Constituency is set to act as the chairman of the Pyithu Hluttaw Bill Committee, formed with 15 members, while Stephen (Union Solidarity and Development Party) of Kengtung Constituency will serve as secretary. For the Pyithu Hluttaw Public Accounts Committee, Aung Min (National League for Democracy) of Zalun Constituency was nominated for the chairman of the committee and Khin Maung Than (National League for Democracy) of Toungoo Constituency for the secretary. The committee comprises 15 members.²

The first regular session of the second Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) entered its **Fourth Day** on 8 February, approving the members of the two standing committees. The Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Win Myint sought parliamentary approval for the lists of the members of the Pyithu Hluttaw Rights Committee and the Pyithu Hluttaw Government Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee. He also sought approval for the terms, duties, rights and powers of the two committees. Next, the Speaker announced that the Pyithu Hluttaw Rights Committee was established with 15 members led by Chairman MP T Khun Myat (Union Solidarity and Development Party) of Kutkai Constituency and Secretary Dr Hla Moe (National League for Democracy) of Aungmyay Thasan Constituency. Likewise, the Pyithu Hluttaw Government Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee was approved with 15 members, including Chairperson Dr May Win Myint (National League for Democracy) of Mayangon Constituency and Secretary Zone Teint (Union Solidarity and Development Party) of Chipwe Constituency.³

AMYOTHA HLUTTAW (UPPER HOUSE) SESSIONS

The Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) was convened in Nay Pyi Taw on 3 February, electing MP Mann Win Khaing Than (National League for Democracy) from Kayin State Constituency-8 as the Speaker of the Upper House and MP Aye Tha Aung (Rakhine National Party) from Rakhine State Constituency-6 as Deputy Speaker. The Speaker, Mann Win Khaing Than extended greetings, calling on to work

¹ A New Lower House – Second Pyithu Hluttaw Begins –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 February 2016 (p. 1)

² Parliamentary committees to be formed –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 February 2016 (p. 1 &2)

³ Pyithu Hluttaw approves two standing committees –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 February 2016 (p. 2)

together with trust and in a friendly manner, without racism, attachments religious faiths and attachments to personality cults, for peace, the rule of law and national reconciliation. In his speech, the newly elected speaker also stressed the importance of making laws for peace, rule of law and national reconciliation in building a federal, democratic nation. He also encouraged MPs to work with loyalty in writing a new history for the country while seizing opportunities for building a federal, democratic country. Among the 224 MPs the Amyotha Hluttaw, 135 are members of the National League for Democracy (NLD): 56 are appointees of the Tatmadaw; 11 are from the Union Solidarity and Development Party; 10 are from Arakan National Party; three are from the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy; two are from the Zomi Congress for Democracy; and one each from the National Unity Party, the Pa-o National Organisation and the Mon National Party. A total of 223 MPs attended the first session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw.⁴

The first regular session of the second Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) continued for the **Second Day** in Nay Pyi Taw on 4 February, with discussions for formation of their parliamentary committees. At the meeting of the Amyotha Hluttaw, Speaker Mann Win Khaing Than and MP Min Oo (National League for Democracy) from Bago Region Constituency No 6 clarified matters related to the formation of the parliament's bill committee, including duties, authorities, rights and term of the committee. The Speaker submitted nominations for the bill committee, choosing MP Zaw Min (National League for Democracy) of Sagaing Region Constituency-6 as Chairman while Dr Myat Nyanna Soe (National League for Democracy) of Yangon Region Constituency-3 as a Secretary along with 13 members for the committee. Speaker Mann Win Khaing Than also nominated Saw Than Htut (National League for Democracy) of Kayin State Constituency-2 as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and Dr Sai Hseng Kyauk Sam (Union Solidarity and Development Party) of Shan State Constituency-6 as the secretary of the committee along with 13 members.⁵

The first regular session of the 2nd Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) continued on 8 February, with MPs approving the Amyotha Hluttaw Rights Committee and the Amyotha Hluttaw Government Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee. The Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than read out a message sent by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China Zhang Dejiang, and the message was documented. Next, the Speaker sought the approval of the parliament for the lists of the members, terms, duties, rights and powers of the two committees. During the session, the Amyotha Hluttaw Rights Committee was formed with 15 members led by chairman MP Aye Tha Aung of Rakhine State Constituency-6 and secretary MP Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency-6. The session also approved the appointment of MP Thein Swe (National League for Democracy) of Ayeyawady Region Constituency-10 to act as Chairman and MP Kyaw Ni Naing (Union Solidarity and Development Party) of Shan State Constituency-11 to act as Secretary of the 15-member Government Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee.⁶

PYIDAUNGSU HLUTTAW SCHEDULES PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS FOR 17 MARCH

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw at its session on 8 February announced that group meetings for the nominations of three vice-presidents would take place on 17 March in order to elect Myanmar's next president and two vice presidents. The three candidates are to be respectively nominated by the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House), the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and the Tatmadaw MPs. At the first meeting of the second parliament, Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than pledged to strive, without

⁴ New Upper House –Amyotha Hluttaw elects new speaker, deputy speaker –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 February 2016 (p. 1)

⁵ Parliamentary committees to be formed –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 February 2016 (p. 1 & 2)

⁶ Amyotha Hluttaw approves two standing committees –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 February 2016 (p. 2)

corruption or bias, to promote democracy and human rights for the people of Myanmar. He also called on MPs to work together, without attachments to racism, party loyalties, personality cults, regionalism or religious extremism, in the interest of the country and the people. The Speaker read a message sent by the President Thein Sein to the first meeting of the second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw.⁷

PYIDAUNGSU HLUTTAW APPROVES JOINT BILL COMMITTEE AND OTHER PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

The second Pyidaungsu Hluttaw's first regular session on its 3rd day, approved the Joint Bill Committee and forming of the Joint Public Accounts Committee and the Committee on Scrutinising Hluttaw Representatives yesterday. MP Dr Sai Hseng Kyauk Hsam of Shan State Constituency 6 clarified the formation, duties and the functions of the Joint Public Accounts Committee. Next, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than announced that the Joint Public Accounts Committee is set to comprise 15 members involving Deputy Speaker Aye Tha Aung as the Chairman and Saw Than Htut of Kayin State Constituency 2 and Aung Min of Zalun Constituency as the Vice-chairs, Dr Sai Hseng Kyauk Hsam of Shan State Constituency 6 as the Secretary and Khin Maung Than of Toungoo Constituency as the Joint Secretary. MP Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency 6 elaborated on the formation and duties and functions of the Committee on Scrutinizing Hluttaw Representatives. The Speaker then informed the session on the formation of the 15 member-committee led by Dr Hla Moe of Aungmyay Thasan Constituency as the Chairman and Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency 6 as the Secretary. The session approved the 15-member Joint Bill Committee headed by Deputy Speaker Aye Tha Aung together with vice-chairmen Zaw Min of Sagaing Region Constituency 6 and Tun Aung (a) Tun Hein (National League for Democracy) of Nawngkio Constituency, Secretary Dr Myat Nyana Soe of Yangon Region Constituency 3, Joint Secretary Stephen of Kengtung Constituency and members Daw Khin Htay Kywe (National League for Democracy) of Chaungzong Constituency, Kyaw Soe Lin (National League for Democracy) of Pyigy Tagun Constituency, Wai Hlaing Tun (National League for Democracy) of Patheingyi Constituency, Khin Maung Win (National League for Democracy) of Lanmadaw Constituency, Defense Services Personnel Hluttaw Representative Brig-Gen Maung, Aung Kyi Nyunt (National League for Democracy) of Magway Region Constituency 4, Thein Lwin (National League for Democracy) of Kachin State Constituency 10, Daw Kyein Ngaik Man (Zomi Democracy Party) of Chin State Constituency 7, Daw Nwe New Aung (National League for Democracy) of Mon State Constituency 2 and Kyaw Kyaw (Rakhine National Party) of Rakhine State Constituency 4.⁸

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

US DECIDES ON NEXT AMBASSADOR TO BURMA

The U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed President Barack Obama's nomination of Scott Marciel, the current Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, to be the next ambassador to Burma on 9 February. The Administration also assured lawmakers it would not rush to ease sanctions as the country moves from decades of military rule. The Senate voted 90-0 to confirm career diplomat Scott Marciel to the post and who has also served as ambassador to Indonesia, the Philippines, Brazil and Turkey and served in Vietnam.⁹

⁷ One More Face Off: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw schedules presidential nominations for 17 March – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 February 2016 (p. 1)

⁸ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Joint Bill Committee, forms two other parliamentary committees – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 February 2016 (p. 2)/ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw creates 15-member Joint Bill Committee – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-02-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 February 2016 (p. 2)

⁹ US decides on next ambassador to Burma – <http://www.dvb.no/news/us-decides-on-next-ambassador-to-burma/60659> (DVB) 10 February 2016

EU TO CONTINUE POLICE REFORM PROGRAM

The European Union (EU), which has been implementing a series of reform initiatives for the Myanmar police force, will continue with their activities over the coming five-year period, expanding to more parts of the country, the Global New Light of Myanmar reported on 8 January. The EU conducted training sessions with the Myanmar police between 2013-15 on cooperation with the general public and ability to control the mobs.

However, the program has faced some criticism, Ko Aung Naing Oo, international relations officer of the Human Rights Defence Group, was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "The Myanmar police force reform programs are yet to show any positive results. Yes, the EU has given training. But, just look at the example of the Letpadan student protests. Reformation of the police force must also come from the side of the government as well. The EU is carrying out its activities but no impact has been felt as yet. The discussion groups and trainings will at least have some benefit though."

The Head of the EU's Media and Civil Society section Karin Deckenbach, was quoted as saying, "The situation [of the Myanmar police force] in Myanmar cannot be changed in just a couple of years. Changes to the police force require patience. In the next five years we will implement reform programs for the police force on a nationwide scale."¹⁰

KNU DELEGATE MEETS REGIONAL PEACE SUPPORT GROUP IN CAMBODIA

The four-member Karen National Union delegation led by KNU Secretary Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, visited Cambodia from the 2nd to the 4th February, 2016 and met with officials from the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPSC) to discuss cooperation in the peace building process in Burma. Regarding the visit, KNU Secretary Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win said, "The organization [CPSC] is helping with our peace process. Our visit is to discuss about further cooperation for our future works."

The trip was the first time KNU delegates visited Cambodia. Sources from the KNU said that discussions included issues concerning the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and conducting training for technical know-how to help with the implementation of the peace process in Burma. According to the KNU delegation, CPSC has agreed to provide a training course that could help with the peace and national reconciliation process and to open office to coordinate the process.

Naw Eh Paw Wah, a local youth activist operating in the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) areas said; "Although we have already organized a similar training course in DKBA areas, there is still a need to do more. This is work we always have to do. When a conflict is solved another different conflict may arise. That's the nature of antagonism. We should always conduct such training courses. It can also help our different Karen organizations."¹¹

ANP SPEAKERS SELECTED IN ARAKAN STATE PARLIAMENT

The Arakan (Rakhine) State Parliament approved Arakan National Party (ANP) nominations for speaker and deputy speaker as the new regional legislature convened on 8 February. San Kyaw Hla, an ANP lawmaker from Ponnagyun Township was selected as house speaker and Phoe Min from Rathedaung Township will serve as the deputy speaker.

The ANP won 23 state seats in November's general election while the National League for Democracy (NLD) won 9 seats and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 3 seats. Military MPs will take 12 seats in the parliament.

¹⁰ EU to continue police reform program – <http://mizzima.com/latest-news-news-domestic/eu-continue-police-reform-program>(Mizzima) 8 February 2016

¹¹ KNU Delegate Meets Regional Peace Support Group In Cambodia – <http://karennews.org/2016/02/knu-delegate-meets-regional-peace-support-group-in-cambodia.html/> (Karen News) 9 February 2016

ANP released a statement on 7 February reaffirming the sentiments expressed by the party on 19 January - that the ANP will stand in firm opposition to the new NLD government if they are denied the right to form their own state-level administration. In the statement, the ANP said it welcomed all suggestions put forward by monks, civil society organizations and voters and that the party held a Central Executive Committee meeting to discuss these submissions on 6 February. The party also announced that it will formally end its affiliation with United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a coalition of ethnic political parties formed after Burma's 1990 election. Instead, the ANP will partner with National Brotherhood Federation (NBF), another ethnic coalition formed after the 2010 election, stating that the NBF will be better able to understand Arakanese issues and concerns.

After the NLD indicated in December that all chief ministers would be NLD lawmakers, the ANP declared that it "won't join any government organization, but stand as an opposition party for the interests of Arakan people," unless the party is granted an exemption and allowed to form its own government.¹²

FIRST WOMAN ELECTED TO CHAIR MON STATE HLUTTAW

The first woman has been elected as chairperson of Mon State Hluttaw during the first regular state Hluttaw session on 8 February. The appointment was made at the Mon State Hluttaw in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State.

At the session, Kyaik Hto Township Constituency (2) winner Dr. Aye Zan of the NLD was briefly appointed the assembly chairman. Daw Tin Ei of the NLD, who won the Thanbyuzayat Township Constituency (1) was then elected as the Hluttaw Chairwoman. Concurrently, MP Min Oo of the NLD and elected Belin Township Constituency (2) representative was appointed as vice-chairman of the State Hluttaw.

"It is important for the law-passing capacity at the Hluttaw. We will pass laws that will protect people's lives and properties as well as be beneficial to the people. At Hluttaw, we will mainly work on this law-passing," said Daw Tin Ei, the newly elected Speaker. Daw Tin Ei added that at the moment she couldn't talk overtly about the future implementation of state-level matters but only comment on general issues.

The number of newly elected representatives for Mon State Hluttaw is 23. The Hluttaw is comprised of 19 representatives from NLD, 2 from Mon National Party, 1 from All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP) and 1 from Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

"We want to have our [Mon] people appointed for Mon State Chairperson and vice-chairperson. Only a few representatives from Mon parties were elected. However, my wish is to appoint one of them. Even if it is a vice-chairperson position. If a Mon representative were appointed they'd have a better understanding of what is happening with the public. Now they [NLD] only appoint their own representatives. If only we could do this, but it's just not possible, because in total there are only 11 [elected] Mon people at this Hluttaw," said Min Aung Mon, a Mon but representative of the USDP, elected from Kyaikmayaw Township Constituency (2). Min Aung Mon continued that only Mon people know the needs of Mon people. Everyone should cooperate for the benefit of the [Mon] people.

Also at the session, outgoing Chairman Kyin Pe (Union Solidarity and Development Party) handed over his chairmanship to Daw Ti Ei. All 31 Hluttaw representatives, comprised of 23 elected representatives and 8 representatives from the military, were sworn in at the first regular session.¹³

¹² ANP Speakers Selected in Arakan State Parliament – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/anp-speakers-selected-in-arakan-state-parliament.html> (the Irrawaddy) 8 February 2016

¹³ First woman elected to chair Mon State Hluttaw – <http://monnews.org/2016/02/09/first-woman-elected-to-chair-mon-state-hluttaw/> (IMNA) 9 February 2016

ANALYSIS

The beginning of the parliamentary sessions of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union) comprising of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) has been regarded many as being significant in two ways: firstly, the introduction of many democratically elected MPs to both houses of parliament, but also more importantly hailed as a 'very important step forward' in the country's transition to democracy. While the convening of parliamentary sessions can be seen as a development and factor in contributing to Myanmar's on-going reform process, many major challenges and impediments still remain for the realisation of a democratic and civilian government to take reins in the country. The country's recent past marred by ethnic conflicts as well as mismanagement by successive military governments will now entrust its new legislators to address a spectrum of problems and no doubt the transition to a more open society will not be easy. Key issues include the continued implementation of the recently signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), national reconciliation and the role of the military in the country's democratic reform process. Hopes and expectations of the nation and the international community for the two houses of parliament, to deliver and transform Myanmar into a democratic nation remain high. However, it is crucial that the new government and the two houses of parliament work hand in hand but more importantly to adopt and implement measures in promoting fundamental basic human rights as well as accountability and transparency.