

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 6

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PYIDAUNGSU HLUTTAW ELECTS HTIN KYAW AS PRESIDENT

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw elected NLD MP Htin Kyaw as President by vote on 15 March while the other two candidates USDP MP Myint Swe and NLD MP Henry Van Thio were selected as Vice Presidents. Htin Kyaw, 70, submitted by the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), won the presidential election with the highest number of votes, 360, becoming the new president for the next five-year term, followed by Myint Swe nominated by the representatives of the Tatmadaw with 213 votes and Henry Van Thio from the Pyithu Hluttaw with 79 votes. A total of 652 MPs from the two Houses casted their votes in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, chaired by Speaker Mahn Win Khaing Than.¹

PRESIDENT-ELECT PROPOSES 21 MINISTRIES, 18 MINISTERS

President-elect Htin Kyaw submitted a proposal for the formation of the next government with 21 ministries as well as 18 ministers to the parliament on 17 March. The president-elect proposed the creation of a new Ministry of the Ethnic Affairs among the 21 ministries, slimming the government down from the 36 ministries of the outgoing government. The ministries proposed by the president-elect are as follows:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs ;
- Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation ;
- Ministry of Transport and Communication ;
- Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs ;
- Ministry of Resources and Environmental Conservation ;
- Ministry of Electric Power and Energy ;
- Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population ;
- Ministry of Planning and Finance ;
- Ministry of Industry;
- Ministry of Health ;
- Ministry of Education ;
- Ministry of Construction ;
- Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement ;
- Ministry of Hotels and Tourism ;
- Ministry of Commerce ;
- Ministry of Information ;
- Ministry of Ethnic Affairs ;
- Ministry of the President's Office ;
- Ministry of Defence ;
- Ministry of Home Affairs and
- Ministry of Border Affairs.

The President-elect's proposal was discussed in parliament on the 9th day session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, by 5 MPs who expressed their support for the proposal. MP Naing Htoo Aung of Ngahtoegy Constituency supported the proposal on the formation of the next government with 21 ministries, comparing the number of ministries formed in Thailand and Singapore and the United States with a

¹ The Face of Change : Pyidaungsu Hluttaw elects U Htin Kyaw president –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 March 2016 (p. 1)/
Historic Moment: MPs to elect president, vice presidents today –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 March 2016 (p. 1)

population of 320 million. MP J Yaw Wu, a Kachin State representative, also supported the President-elect's proposal to have 21 ministries as well as 18 ministers and welcomed the proposal to form the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, saying that the Law on Protection of Ethnic Minorities Rights passed in the first Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is productive. MP Thant Sin Maung of Monywa Constituency suggested that the Ministry of Cooperatives be excluded from the list of proposed ministries should be under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation as the two ministries are similar in their undertakings of providing loans to rural people. MP Ba Shein of Kyaukpyu Constituency also expressed his delight at the proposed formation of the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs and over restructuring the next administration, but called for a detailed explanation on how the 4 ministries excluded from the proposal are set to be merged with which ministries. MP Dr Aung Thu of Yangon Region Constituency No 6 lauded the merger of ministries to make implementation more efficient and effective and formation of the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs to achieve national reconciliation for ensuring non-disintegration of the Union and non-disintegration of national unity. Parliamentary approval for the proposal is set to be sought on the 10th day session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. The President-elect is scheduled to make clarification on his proposal and make a decision on it on 21 March. According to the constitution, the Ministries of Home Affairs, Border Affairs and Defence will be run by the Myanmar Defence Services. The Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) has formed an 8-member Joint-Coordination Committee for Development of Parliamentary Affairs, which will be chaired by Aung San Suu Kyi, the chairperson of the National League for Democracy (NLD).²

TATMADAW RELEASES 46 CHILD SOLDIERS

The Tatmadaw released 46 children and young people from service on 12 March, handing them over to their parents as part of an effort to rid its ranks of under aged-soldiers. The military has released 744 underage recruits in 12 batches including the latest release. Action was taken against 382 soldiers including 73 officers and 309 other ranks involved in the recruitment of the children. "The Tatmadaw is committed to rid its ranks of underage soldiers," said the Army-run Myawady Daily quoting Maj-Gen Tauk Tun of the Commander-in-Chief's (Army) Office who delivered an address at the ceremony. The Tatmadaw has banned recruiting underage children for the army, pledging that it has been scrutinizing its forces in order to release those who were recruited wrongly. At the ceremony held at the Transit Centre in Yangon, authorities presented national citizenship scrutiny cards to the underage soldiers. The children were discharged to their families in the presence of senior officers from the Tatmdaw, Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Labour, Employment and Social Securities, Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and responsible personnel from UNICEF and UNHCR, International Labour Organization, Save the Children, World Vision, World Food Programme and UNDP. The Tatmadaw will provide them with health care, opportunities for formal and informal education, receiving vocational skills and jobs. Since 2011, the Tatmadaw has taken some steps to professionalize the armed forces, including the release of soldiers recruited under the age of 18.³

US PLEDGES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO MYANMAR ANTI-TIP PROJECT

The United States has pledged assistance to Myanmar's measures against human trafficking, following an agreement of cooperation, according to the Myanmar Police Force. Chief Police Maj-Gen Zaw Win confirmed the signing of the bilateral agreement in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 March. Under the agreement, World Vision (Myanmar) will render assistance to prosecution against smugglers, training to social workers, and closer cooperation in the rehabilitation of victims. The United States

² President-elect proposes 21 ministries, 18 ministers –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 March 2016 (p. 1)/
President-elect to clarify ministries on Monday –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 March 2016 (p. 1 & 2)

³ Home from the Front: Tatmadaw releases 46 child soldiers –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-13-red.pdf> (GNLM) 13 March 2016

has pledged \$700,000 for a 3-year plan from 1 October 2015 to 30 October 2018. The plan is aimed at protection and rehabilitation of the victims in Myanmar and will be carried out in partnership with local departments, civil society, and INGOs and NGOs from Australia and the United States. Myanmar joined the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and signed its protocols and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT MoU) in 2004 as part of cooperation in the fight against human trafficking by the 6 countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. It also became a signatory to the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in November, 2015. As for bilateral cooperation, Myanmar has been working together with its neighbors China and Thailand in combating human trafficking after drawing action plans. Police Maj-Gen Zaw Win spoke of two five-year plans for anti-human trafficking, the first from 2007 to 2011 and the second from 2012 to 2016.⁴

MPF, USIP ORGANISE POST-ELECTION REVIEW WORKSHOP

The Myanmar Police Force (MPF) and United States Institute of Peace (USIP) jointly organized a workshop on the post-election review in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 March. The event was attended by senior police officers, USIP's Country Director for Myanmar Vanessa Johansson and experts from the Institute. Myanmar Police Chief Police Maj-Gen Zaw Win called for ways and means to be sought at the workshop to ensure the successful holding of future elections, acknowledging public participation in the 2015 general elections. The workshop is aimed at holding discussions on various topics including the establishment of a coordination mechanism to improve relations among stakeholders including government agencies and political parties, media and public relations, risk assessment and violence prevention, study on conflict management strategies and lessons learned from electoral security.⁵

GOVT RETURNS OVER 370,000 ACRES OF LAND TO OWNER

The Land Use Management Central Committee released a statement on the progress of settling land disputes across the country on 17 March, saying more than 370,000 acres of land have been returned to their original owners. The statement said that, so far, 13,596 of 17,718 cases presented by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw 'Investigation Commission for easing the suffering of people whose farmlands and other lands were confiscated' to the committee were resolved as of 29 February 2016. Also, 1,197 of 3,782 cases directly sent to the committee and presented by the President's Office and Union Government Office have also been settled. The committee also dealt with cases of lands set to be returned to owners by ministries and companies totaling 403,716 acres of disputed land of which 374,631 acres had been transferred to their previous owners and called on the land owners to contact respective Land Management Committees and provide documents regarding their ownership.⁶

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ANP EXPELS SIX SENIOR OFFICIALS IN RIFT

The Arakan National Party – the most successful of all Myanmar's ethnic parties in last year's elections – on 13 March decided to expel 6 senior officials for refusing to toe the party line of opposing the National League for Democracy (NLD) at state and national level. Analysts in Sitwe,

⁴ Fighting the Good Fight : US pledges financial assistance to Myanmar anti-TIP Project – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 March 2016 (p. 1)

⁵ MPF, USIP organize post-election review workshop – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 March 2016 (p. 2)

⁶ Govt returns over 370,000 acres of land to owner – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2016-03-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 March 2016 (p. 2)

capital of Rakhine State and an ANP stronghold, said the expulsions would result in a more hard-line approach towards the NLD but risked splitting the party, which was formed as a merger of two rival groups two years ago. The expulsion decision followed an urgent closed-door meeting of its central committee held in Pan Millar village outside Sittwe on 12 March. The crisis was prompted by a press conference held in Yangon on 6 March in which members of the former Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), which merged with the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) to form the ANP, announced that they would not support the party policy of opposing the NLD. The ANP won 22 seats in the national parliament and came close to winning a majority in the Rakhine State assembly last November. It set itself in opposition to the NLD after Aung San Suu Kyi rebuffed ANP demands to be given the position of Rakhine Chief Minister. The former ALD enjoyed closer ties with the NLD in the past and its members said trying to block the NLD was not in the interests of Rakhine State. It is not clear whether the expulsion of the 6 members, who are not MPs, will have an impact on the vote expected in the national parliament on 15 March for president and vice president. The ANP leadership meeting also decided that it would refuse to take any cabinet seats offered in the central government by Aung San Suu Kyi under her policy of national reconciliation. The nationalist ANP strongly defends the interests of the Buddhist Rakhine majority in the state, which was torn apart by communal violence in 2012, resulting in the military-backed government's policy of segregating the stateless Muslim minority. Members of the international community working in Rakhine had been alarmed at the prospect of an ANP-led state government. There was debate whether the 6 dissenters should be expelled, demoted or suspended. Some committee members feared that expulsion would result in more cracks in party unity. "I thought demotion or suspension was a better way," Aung Kyaw Twee, adding that he would respect the majority decision. The expulsions leave former ALD Chair Aye Thar Aung, as the lone member of the ALD faction on the ANP central committee. Last month Aye Thar Aung, a close associate of Aung San Suu Kyi in the 1990s, was chosen by the NLD as Deputy Speaker of the Upper House in a move that is reported to have angered Aye Maung, the more stridently Rakhine nationalist ANP chair. Aye Maung said that the party would never withdraw its statement of opposition to the NLD. The dissenters had given the impression to the Rakhine public of a divided party and so they received the highest penalty, he said. "Anyone who wants to stay under the party flag can do so. If not, they can become an individual member of parliament. We must stand consistently by our statement," he said. Moe Kyaw, one of those expelled, said he did not accept the penalty as it did not fit party rules and regulations. "If they expel us, the party will be left with just the RNDP side," he said. The process for expelling the 6 members of the ALD faction ignited a controversy. The 6 refused to be questioned by a special investigation committee before the weekend leadership meeting. Upper House MP and an investigator Phae Than, said the committee based its findings on press coverage and sent its reports to the central committee which then decided on the penalty. "We decided on expulsion because they had seriously broken party policy. The statements we had issued [in January and February to oppose the NLD] were our political stance. We have to stand by what we said. This is politics," said ANP Secretary Tun Aung Kyaw. He noted that the dissenters had messaged the party during the meeting, identifying themselves as "ANP (ALD)". "This has upset the party. They should not use these words as the party has not split," he said. "ANP is ANP, not ANP (ALD) or ANP (RNDP)," he said. "We are now the ANP. One could say the majority of ANP are RNDP members. So, if they [ALD faction] want power in the party, they should build their side and recruit more members."⁷

KARENNI CSOS URGE HYDROPOWER PROJECT SUSPENSION

In celebrating the International Day of Action for Rivers and Against Dams, 17 Karenni civil society organizations (CSOs) issued a statement on 14 March calling for the suspension of hydroelectric

⁷ ANP expels six senior officials in rift –

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/19444-anp-expels-six-senior-officials-in-rift.html> (Myanmar Times)
14 March 2016

projects on Prawn and Salween Rivers and other large-scale power projects in Karenni State. The groups cited concerns about negative environmental impacts on Karenni people and threats to the ongoing peace process.

“Prawn River has been beneficial to us for many centuries and blocking it could cause big problems. This project is like a time bomb for the peace process. I am very worried that once the dam is constructed on the river, it will cause troubles for the residents of the ancient Bawlakhe City right beside the river. This could also break the ceasefire signed by the KNPP [Karenni National Progressive Party], so this project could threaten peace in Karenni State,” said Khu Ko Reh of the Karenni Civil Society Network.

CSO members also expressed concern that government troops would be sent in to provide security reinforcements around dam sites during construction, possibly threatening the accord between the army and several ethnic armed groups in Karenni State. According to the CSOs’ statement, the company has already begun land surveying for construction without yet holding consultations with residents. The Salween, Prawn and Thatbet rivers are considered by many as the lifeblood of the Karenni people, who depend on the local ecosystem for forests, agriculture, and fishing. The 17 Karenni CSOs urged the government to suspend hydropower and other major projects until ethnic groups achieve the right for self-determination within a federal system and political solutions are found for key ethnic issues. The 17 CSOs which released the statement included the Karenni State Farmers Union, Karenni Women Association, Future Thanlwin, Kayah State Youth Network, Karenni National Youth Organization, and Karenni Teachers Union.⁸

IDPS SCATTER AS SPORADIC FIGHTING SWEEPS NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Sporadic fighting across northern Shan State is sending civilians fleeing in different directions, with some attempting to return to their homes and then being forced on the run again. Aid workers say the unpredictability of the conflict, which covers half a dozen townships and involves the Tatmadaw and armed forces of two ethnic armed organizations, is complicating relief agency efforts to track numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Many are staying in makeshift camps in Buddhist monasteries, while large numbers have sought refuge in the homes of friends and relatives but still need aid.

“The pattern of short armed clashes, population displacements, returns, and re-displacements sadly continues to categorise life for conflict-affected communities in Shan State in 2016,” said Pierre Peron, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

While the Tatmadaw is focusing its offensives on the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), analysts see the military’s main objectives as securing strategic territory lying across trade and energy routes leading to China, while driving a wedge between the Kachin Independence Army mainly to the north and the United Wa State Army – the largest of Myanmar’s armed groups – further to the southeast. In political circles the Tatmadaw’s deployment of more troops and air power is also seen as an assertion of the military’s strength and independence from the executive as Aung San Suu Kyi’s new government prepares to take office. OCHA staff working with local organizations in reception areas estimate that more than 1000 people have been newly displaced in the past week following the latest outbreak of fighting north of Kutkai between government forces and the TNLA. UN staffs were granted access to arrival sites on 14 March to assess humanitarian needs.

“An estimated 650 displaced people have arrived at Nam Hpet Kar village, with more people arriving daily. A further 440 people fled to Mong Yu Lay village, where they are staying with host families and

⁸ Karenni CSOs urge hydropower project suspension – <http://monnews.org/2016/03/15/karenni-csos-urge-hydropower-project-suspension/> (IMNA) 15 March 2016

monasteries who are providing initial assistance,” Peron said. He also noted recent outbreaks of violence and “small displacements” in Kyaukme, Namkham, Mong Shu and Mansi Townships. “In Kyaukme, some 3000 people have been able to return home, but there are still about 1200 that cannot go home due to ongoing insecurity and clashes in their specific village areas,” he said.

TNLA officer Tar Pan Hla said that according to the group’s latest figures there were a total of 3225 IDPs in the three townships of Kutkai, Namkham on the border with China, and Manton. He did not give figures for civilians displaced in Kyaukme, Namhsan and Nawngcho townships. Those seeking refuge in Nam Hpet Kar and Mong Yu Lay in Kutkai Township are ethnic Ta’ang, also known as Palaung, according to Mai Hla Shwe, Chair of the Ta’ang Literature and Culture Association. “The numbers of people displaced by war has increased in recent days. They are worried that clashes would break out in their villages, although most of the fighting is in the forest far from villages,” he said. Mai Yu Kyaw of the Ta’ang Literature and Culture Association, said there are just a few donor organizations on the ground and that supplies are inadequate. Rice, medicines and clothing are needed, he said. The fighting has prompted international appeals for restraint by all sides.⁹

ANALYSIS

The proposal to down-size the government structure from over 30 ministries to 21 is seen by many to be positive. But the reality in merging the day to day operations could prove to be otherwise. While the proposal to streamline government ministries is being implemented as an austerity measure, it is important to note that at a time of transition and with a civil service that has not been fully functional, the new government will need to adopt and implement measures to educate, develop and transform the civil service if the mergers are to be successful. Past governments have resorted to authority and power whereas the NLD-government will need to adhere and promote democratic principles. To do so, the civil service must become a crucial part of the new government’s first line of defenders and promoters. In the past, due to mismanagement, Myanmar’s civil service has been unable to serve the interests of the public and inefficient. It therefore is crucial that if the President-elect’s proposal is to succeed; it should be done in a way not only to save the government’s coffers but also include measures and initiatives to promote the development and capacity of the civil service.

⁹ IDPs scatter as sporadic fighting sweeps northern Shan State – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/19481-idps-scatter-as-sporadic-fighting-sweeps-northern-shan-state.html> (Myanmar Times) 16 March 2016