
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 10

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT AND STATE COUNSELLOR RECEIVES JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER

President Htin Kyaw received Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 3 May and discussed the formation of a Japan-Myanmar Joint Initiative and matters regarding democratic reforms, the providing of assistance to aid the enforcement of the rule of law, Japan's involvement in the development process as a development partner, the providing of assistance in the financial sector and Japan's investment in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi also met with Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida and discussed matters relating to urban development of the City of Yangon, the upgrading of railway transport, ensuring that the full rights of Myanmar workers in Japan are respected, participation in Myanmar's peace process and the providing of scholarship awards.¹

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER MEETS USAID ADMINISTRATOR

Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi received the Administrator for United States Agency for International Development-USAID Gayle Smith in Nay Pyi Taw on 3 May and discussed matters concerning pro-motion of cooperation between the two countries in the areas of implementation of Food Security Strategy, greater private sector participation and healthcare. The US delegation also held a separate meeting with Union Ministers Dr Than Myin and Dr Aung Thu and held discussions on cooperation in agricultural growth, land re-form, trade facilitation and access to finance, which are prioritised sectors. They also exchanged views on human resources development, food security, raising farmers' income, promotion of crop quality, narrowing the rural-urban development gap, the promotion of trade and productivity and technological assistance to SMEs.²

GOVT VOWS TO PROTECT LABOUR RIGHTS, END FORCED LABOUR

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population issued a statement on 1 May International Workers' Day, expressing its commitment to promoting and protecting labour rights, including ending forced labour and stronger enforcement of child labour laws in Myanmar. In its statement, the ministry invited all interested partners to join with the government in its efforts to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on labour-related issues.

Speaking at an event to celebrate International Workers' Day in Hlaingthaya Industrial Zone, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population Thein Swe called on the country's employers to respect the rights of workers in accordance with the Labour Law while pursuing their own interests. He also urged the workers to prepare to maximise their workplace efficiency and hone their skills in their chosen areas of work, stressing the need for an increase in productivity, efficiency and competitiveness in the work-place. The Minister also called on the labour organizations involved in labour issues in the country to help the workers to be in line with labour laws. Minister Thein Swe discussed the government's cooperation with private business institutions in conducting in-house

¹ President, JPN FM hold talks over founding of Japan-Myanmar Joint Initiative –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 May 2016 (p. 3)/
Diversities accepted by democracy: State Counsellor –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 May 2016 (p. 3)

² Union Foreign Affairs Minister meets USAID administrator –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/3_May%2016_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 3 May 2016 (p. 3)/
Myanmar government, USAID hold talks on priority sectors –
http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/3_May%2016_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 3 May 2016 (p. 3)

efficiency enhancement trainings and plans to guarantee workers international workplace standards, including in-house training, social security, healthcare, good labour relations and fair hearings on labour disputes.³

USDP VIOLATES PARTY RULES : THURA U SHWE MANN

Former Union parliament speaker and party chairman Thura Shwe Mann has called for an investigation into the legality of his ouster from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) on 22 April by former President Thein Sein. It has been reported that 17 other USDP members were also purged, including the current Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura Aung Ko, allegedly for violating the USDP charter. "Although the dismissal of party members is the internal business of the USDP, it can have an indirect impact in one way or another upon the interests of the country and the people," said Thura Shwe Mann. The former parliamentary speaker suggested that party members, the public and qualified organisations review whether the party's actions are in line with its own rules and regulations. He spoke on the issue at the meeting of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission, to which he was appointed chair-man by NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, on 25 April. "The letters of dismissal were sent on 22 April. This is an act that neglects the party's basic principles," said Amyotha Hluttaw MP Zaw Myint Pe. Thura Shwe Mann plans to hold a press conference on the premises of the Union parliament, where he will respond to questions about the USDP purge against him and his allies.⁴

YANGON CHIEF MINISTER SEEKS SOLUTION TO SQUATTER ISSUE

Negotiations are underway to settle the squatter issue in Yangon Region, and the process will take time, said Yangon Region Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein. It is essential to get an appropriate site to settle the squatters, and in case of factory workers, they should not be settled far from their worksites, he said. In his meeting with officials from industrial zones, the Chief Minister also pledged to coordinate with employers for the sheltering of employees. According to an official from the Hlaingthayar Industrial Zone Management Committee, over 600,000 people reside in Hlaingthayar Township, which is also home to over 8,000 squatter huts. While the numbers of squatters are being collected, the number of new comers has increased in the industrial zones, said an official from the Shwepaukkan Industrial Zone. There has also emerged an opportunistic class of people that builds huts in the industrial zone and rents them to squatters for K20,000 or K30,000 [per month], the official said. After Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the number of migrant workers who moved into Yangon has increased significantly.⁵

AMYOTHA HLUTTAW (UPPER HOUSE) SESSIONS HIGHLIGHTS

The Second Amyotha Hluttaw during its 17th, 18th and 19th Day Sessions discussed the on-going fighting in the Rakhine State and urgent motion calling to end the conflict.

- MP Wai Sein Aung of Rakhine State Constituency 1 put forward an urgent motion calling for an immediate end to the fighting between the Myanmar Defence Services (Tatmadaw) and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State. The motion also calls for bringing the AA into political dialogue.
- MP Khin Maung Latt of Rakhine State Constituency 3, called on the Arakan Army (AA) to peace talks as the present government is moving towards ensuring national

³ Govt vows to protect labour rights, end forced labour –

http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/2_May%2016_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 2 May 2016 (p. 1)

⁴ USDP purge violates party rules : Thura U Shwe Mann –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-04-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 April 2016 (p. 3)

⁵ Yangon chief minister seeks solution to squatter issue –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-04-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 April 2016 (p. 1)

reconciliation and the emergence of a democratic federal Union at the 21st Century Panglong Conference. If the group had been given a chance to ink the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement last year, gunfire that fell silent for 35 years in Rakhine State would have continued to be silent, he added.

- MP Naw Hla Soe of Yangon Region Constituency 10 called on parliament to document the motion with serious consideration of the issue as the entirety of the people are ready to do their bit to ensure the successful holding of the 21st Century Panglong Conference in order to realise stable and lasting peace in the country. All citizens wish to see peace and live together in a country free from armed conflicts through thick and thin, she added.
- MP Sai San Aung of Shan State Constituency 12 highlighted the importance of peace, calling for the inclusion and cooperation of all ethnic minorities as a crucial drive for positive development in domestic political, economic and social sectors, particularly in their own regions.
- Union Minister for Defense Lt-Gen Sein Win called on the AA to end its armed struggle and cooperate with the government elected by the people. He also said the AA opposes Myanmar's democratic system as it is attacking the state that consists of executive, legislative and judicial pillars and the Tatmadaw, which is "safeguarding the country against all internal and external dangers in accordance with Article 339 of the constitution".
- Military-appointed MP Lt-Col Ye Naing said the AA attacked the Tatmadaw's military columns in alliance with the KIA in 2012-2013 and joined the TNLA and MNDAA in attacking the government's administrative mechanism in the Laukkai region in 2015. "The armed groups it joined are organisations breaching the existing laws by fighting against the government and Tatmadaw troops following a peace invitation on 18 August 2011," the military MP said.
- Col Than Htaik, another military MP, stressed the need for "goodwill to achieve peace and prosperity by the entire people with Union spirit". "Only with everyone's cooperation will the nation build a peaceful Union," he added.
- MP U Min Oo of Bago Region Constituency 6 said the proposal should be documented as it needs serious consideration by all members of parliament in order to reach an agreement within a pragmatic framework.⁶

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

MPC TO BE RENAMED 'NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE CENTER'

Burma's State Counselor and de facto leader of the new National League for Democracy (NLD) government Aung San Suu Kyi, has proposed renaming the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) as the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC). The suggestion came as she met with the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC), which includes members of the Burma Army, on 25 April Wednesday in Naypyidaw. The JMC is comprised of representatives from the government, the MPC, the Burma military and the 8 non-state armed organisations that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the former government of President Thein Sein in 2015.

⁶ Seeking Negotiations: Amyotha Hluttaw to discuss proposal to end fighting in Rakhine State – http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/3_May%2016_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 3 May 2016 (p.1 &2)/
Talk on Motion to end fighting in Rakhine – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 May 2016 (p. 1 & 3)/
A Dilemma of Peace: Military MPs Justify Continued Conflict with AA – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 May 2016 (p. 1)

Suu Kyi “announced the appointment of Dr. Tin Myo Win, her personal physician, as the peace negotiator for the nationwide ceasefire agreement” at her meeting with the JMC. Whoever takes on the leadership role in the NRPC would replace Minister Aung Min, who led the peace process under the previous administration. Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Chairman of the JMC, emphasized the need to continue the achievements attained thus far in the peace process. “At present, we have to work to maintain the current stability based on the understanding and relationships of leaders from both sides,” he said. “When there are leadership changes, we have to start from very beginning again.” Lt-Gen. Yar Pyae called for the establishment of a systematic mechanism for monitoring the NCA that would function regardless of such changes.

The JMC conducts monitoring at three levels—Union, state and local levels. It is now in need of funds to continue its functions as the funds provided by the former MPC have been exhausted. Suu Kyi said she would seek international assistance to fund the NRPC and would make sure those funds were used properly, according to Shwe Kha, secretary of the JMC. “A separate meeting will be held to discuss who should be included in the re-organized MPC. She [Suu Kyi] will make the decision. They’ll invite ethnic [representatives] and officials from JMC to the meeting,” added Saw Issac Po, Vice-Chair of the JMC. It was not yet clear whether senior peace advisors who played a major role in the MPC would be included in the reorganized body. The MPC was formed in 2012 and operated with funds from the United Nations, the European Union, Japan and other foreign governments.⁷

UWSA WANTS CHINA IN PEACE PROCESS

Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed group, the United Wa State Army (UWSA), has set out its demands for the peace process – including China's participation – following talks with a delegation from the National League for Democracy. Soe Htay, a former senior military officer elected last year as NLD MP for Kawkaik Township in Kayin State, confirmed on 1 May that he had led a delegation of “observers” to the Wa stronghold of Panghsang in Shan State on the border with China from April 26 to 28. The MP, a member of parliament's peace and ethnic affairs committee, said he had served in the Wa area as a Tatmadaw commander and had friendly relations with the chief commander of the UWSA. He said that his visit was aimed at understanding the region. “We are going to the Wa region to observe the ethnic area for peace-building but were not assigned by the president or the state counsellor,” he said. He added that he had urged the UWSA to take part in a conference of all ethnic armed groups which Aung San Suu Kyi called last week to be held within two months. The UWSA maintains close ties to China and runs what amounts to a quasi-autonomous enclave serving as a conduit for jade and narcotics smuggled out of Myanmar. It refused to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement along with other armed groups, leaving Myanmar government and military officials convinced that China was behind the boycott. Chinese media at the weekend carried an 8-point statement by Xiao Mingliang, Deputy Chair of the UWSA administration, in which he said the Wa region looked forward to cooperating with the new government and that it respected the results of last November's elections boycotted by the UWSA. He then stated that the UWSA called on the government to hold a peace conference – with the participation of the United Nations and China as “witnesses” – to urgently resolve the conflicts in northern Myanmar. Such a conference would include the federal government, parliament, the military and all ethnic armed groups, Xiao said. Xiao also called on the government to set up “liaison mechanisms” with ethnic armed groups. When conditions were ready, he said, then the government should embark on constitutional changes which should be neither wholesale nor minor. One change he appeared to endorse was removing the ban on Aung San Suu Kyi serving as president. Reflecting the UWSA's close ties to China, the statement urged the NLD government in pursuing its economic policies to take advantage of China's “One belt, one road”

⁷ MPC to Be Renamed ‘National Reconciliation and Peace Center’ – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/mpc-to-be-renamed-national-reconciliation-and-peace-center.html> (the Irrawaddy) 28 April 2016

strategy of major infrastructure projects linking its near neighbours to markets in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The new government should also stick to a non-aligned foreign policy, the statement concluded. Tun Hain, an NLD central executive committee member, said he had not known about Soe Htay's talks with the UWSA and that his visit had not been commissioned by the party or members of parliament. However a senior member of the NLD, who asked not to be named, told local news media that Soe Htay may have gone on the instructions of U Tin Myo Win, personal doctor to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who said last week said he would take on a liaison role with ethnic groups. Soe Htay said the most important aspect of peace-building was to "build reliable trust and strong relationships" with leaders of the ethnic armed groups.⁸

NLD PUNISHES MP FOR PEACE MISSION

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has disciplined one of its MPs for making an unauthorised mission to the Wa stronghold of Panghsang where he discussed the peace process with Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed group. Former Tatmadaw officer and MP Soe Htay – who served as a deputy commander in Panghsang – led a delegation to meet the United Wa State Army (UWSA) where he had hoped to use his friendly relations with the group's commander-in-chief for the benefit of the peace process. However NLD MP Soe Htay failed to inform the party's central committee about his trip and was reprimanded upon returning. The NLD stripped him of any important duties for a year, including his place on parliament's peace and ethnic affairs committee. Soe Htay said he accepted the punishment but dismissed rumours that the party had expelled him. "I am not dismissed from the party. They will not assign important duties to me for one year. I can appeal, but I won't," said Soe Htay to reporters in parliament. Lower House Speaker Win Myint announced that the party's MP Saw Victor Kalite would replace Soe Htay, who represents Kawkareik Township in Kayin State, on the peace and ethnic affairs committee. Though dismissed from the committee, Soe Htay said he had travelled to the remote rebel-held area on a fact-finding mission for the peace process and he was still able to report his findings and suggestions to the committee. "I have no separate duties for the peace [and ethnic affairs] committee. But I can make suggestions and submit my findings," he said. As Soe Htay visited the UWSA headquarters, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi called for a Second Panglong Conference – in the spirit of her father's legacy – during a meeting with the Joint Monitoring Committee of the nationwide ceasefire accord. The conference would include groups, such as the UWSA that had refused to sign the controversial agreement.⁹

THREE ARMED GROUPS OPT OUT OF TALKS WITH FORMER GOVT PEACE DELEGATION

Three ethnic armed organizations actively fighting the Burma Army have decided against meeting a former government peace delegation in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai, according to a leader from one of the groups. Tar Bong Kyaw, the General Secretary of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), told local news media on 24 April that his group, as well as two allies—the Arakan Army (AA) and the ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)—would not meet with the representatives led by former Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo. The TNLA general explained that they were opting out of the talks because they would not be considered "official." "We didn't believe that they could help with anything for peace in this meeting," Tar Bong Kyaw said.

The alliance of Arakanese, Kokang and Ta'ang armed groups "want to meet those who can really work for peace," he added, referring to representatives from the new Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) government, which took office earlier this month. There is tension between the

⁸ UWSA wants China in peace process –
<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20059-uwsa-wants-china-in-peace-process.html> (Myanmar Times)
2 May 2016

⁹ NLD punishes MP for Peace Mission –
<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20101-nld-punishes-mp-for-peace-mission.html> (Myanmar Times)
4 May 2016

3 ethnic armed groups and the military due to recent clashes in western Burma's Arakan State with the AA and in northern Shan State, where the TNLA and MNDAA operate. The groups released a joint statement on 24 April confirming that fighting with the Burma Army is ongoing in their respective areas, where they allege that government forces are engaging in offensives and increasing troop numbers. On state-run TV, Burma Army members were quoted as saying that they hoped to "eliminate" groups like the AA. "[The Burma Army] employed strong military offensives in Rakhine [State]," Tar Bong Kyaw said of ongoing conflict between government forces and the Arakan Army. "They did the same to us. They should stop fighting if they want to have peace." In mid-April, Aung Min, the former chief peace broker for the Burmese government, reportedly contacted the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a coalition of 9 ethnic armed groups who did not sign the country's so-called nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in 2015. It was said that Aung Min had reached out to UNFC Vice Chairman Nai Hong Sar about meeting the AA, MNDAA and TNLA for peace talks; the three groups had been excluded by the government from signing the NCA.¹⁰

RAKHINE CHIEF MINISTER SAYS IDPS FROM ALL COMMUNITIES NEED AID

Rakhine State's new Chief Minister says both Buddhist and Muslim communities displaced by conflict need more aid before the onset of the monsoon season. Nyi Pu of the National League for Democracy on his return from IDP camps near Mrauk-U on 27 April that he intended personally to visit camps for internally displaced people from both communities. "The government has to provide displaced people with settlements that are good, safe and comfortable places for both communities," he said by telephone from the capital Sittwe. The international community is also mobilising aid for civilians displaced by renewed fighting this month between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army, an ethnic armed group based in northern Kachin State but with its roots in Rakhine State's Buddhist majority.

Pierre Peron, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said UN aid workers this week had visited 6 out of 8 locations where an estimated total of about 1000 recently displaced civilians are sheltering in Buthidaung, Kyauktaw and Rathedaung Townships. Many are staying in currently empty schools. Peron said the government had provided food for the IDPs, but there was a need for sleeping mats, cooking utensils, more water and sanitation. "We are mobilising our response to reach the most vulnerable to provide non-food items," he said.

The small camps visited by Nyi Pu near Mrauk-U are sheltering a total of about 100 Rakhine Buddhists displaced in late 2015 by clashes between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw. Others are staying with relatives. The Chief Minister said he would also visit IDP camps with the Japan International Cooperation Agency before the end of the month. While the government is hoping that the recently displaced villagers will soon return to their homes – some in remote hills close to Chin State – aid workers are concerned there will be no let-up in the military offensives against the Arakan Army, meaning shelters will soon be needed once students return to classes in June. More than 100,000 mostly stateless Muslim Rohingya – officially referred to as Bengalis – make up the large majority of IDPs in Rakhine following communal violence that erupted in 2012. However, Nyi Pu's remarks and his decision to first visit displaced Buddhists reflect the political pressure he is under from the Arakan National Party (ANP). The ANP, which defends the interests of the Buddhist majority, emerged as the single biggest party in the state in last November's elections but was denied the position of chief minister by NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. ANP Secretary Tun Aung Kyaw said the chief minister should personally visit civilians displaced by armed conflict as much as possible to show his sympathy. "We have been waiting for and watching the new government, and its actions disappointed us because we could not see enthusiasm on the part of the Rakhine chief minister," he said. Responding to criticism, Nyi Pu said, "We will take action step by step for all aspects of development in Rakhine State but

¹⁰ Three Armed Groups Opt Out of Talks With Former Govt Peace Delegation – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/three-armed-groups-opt-talks-former-govt-peace-delegation.html> (the Irrawaddy) 26 April 2016

improvements take time in some cases. However we will not be neglecting any cases.” Rakhine State’s Information Department said some state ministers and members of the ANP had gone together to see Rakhine civilians displaced by the recent fighting between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw. They said rice, oil, medicine and instant noodles were delivered. Minister for Urban Development Min Aung, said it had been the first time that the new government had visited camps for displaced Rakhine. “It is our responsibility to help people. We don’t want to be blamed by the people that we are not different from the previous government. We must show we are really a government of the people,” he said.¹¹

ANALYSIS

The visits to Nay Pyi Taw by the Japanese Foreign Minister and USAID Administrator are indications and positive signs that the international community is ready to assist Myanmar in its transition from military to civilian rule. However, the array of sensitive and critical issues left unresolved from the previous administration including that of the peace process and political reforms will and should be addressed with care. The recent demand by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) to include China in future peace talks following talks with a delegation from the National League for Democracy (NLD), in which the latter has watered down as an unofficial visit without the party’s approval. Whatever, the case maybe, the notion to include China will raise eyebrows within the military ranks but how the NLD government will respond will be monitored closely by both the 8 NCA Signatories and Non-signatories’ groups. The acceptance or refusal for third party intervention in the country’s peace process has in the past been seen as a non-starter and thus if and to what extent the government is prepared to accommodate such demands by the UWSA and other EAOs will be a test for both the government and the military but more importantly to see if the two can genuinely build trust and cooperate in promoting the interest of the country.

¹¹ Rakhine chief minister says IDPs from all communities need aid – <http://www.mmTimes.com/index.php/national-news/20003-rakhine-chief-minister-says-idps-from-all-communities-need-aid.html> (Myanmar Times) 28 April 2016