

POLITICAL MONITOR No. 21

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PRESIDENT OBAMA MEETS STATE COUNSELLOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI

U.S President Obama met State Counsellor at the White House on 14 September during which Obama issued a statement saying he would reinstate Myanmar to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which provides duty-free treatment for goods from poor and developing countries. He said Myanmar's progress is not complete, but is on right track. Myanmar will be able to export about 5,000 products to the United States duty-free thanks to a new designation under the Generalized System of Preferences trade program which is to take effect on 13 November. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi also held talks with US Vice President Joe Biden and US Secretary of State John Kerry, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Congressman Ed Royce, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Senator Mitch McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid. Discussions were held to promote relations and cooperation between Myanmar and the United States, US congressional support for Myanmar's democratic transition and issues related to the sustainability of democracy in Myanmar, bilateral cooperation between the two nations, measures against human trafficking and assistance to human resources development to aid the fight against illegal trade.¹

STATE COUNSELLOR MAKES OFFICIAL VISITS TO THE U.K AND U.S TO ATTEND 71ST UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi left Yangon on 10 September for the United Kingdom and the United States to attend the 71st United Nations General Assembly. Aung San Suu Kyi met British Prime Minister Theresa May on 13 September. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed Myanmar's transition to democracy and bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries. The British Premier expressed her delight for Myanmar's successful transition to democracy, promising that the new government of Britain would promote bilateral relations and cooperation and would help the development of Myanmar. Britain is also planning to hold a trade and investment forum in November in London to boost bilateral trade and investment, she added. Theresa May also invited the State Counsellor to pay an official goodwill visit to Britain next year. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her thanks to Prime Minister May for Britain's support to Myanmar's transition to democracy and also requested Britain's help to promote Myanmar's agriculture, forestry, education, health, human resource development sectors. Aung San Suu Kyi also invited Mrs May to visit to Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi held talks with the Secretary of State for International Development Priti Patel. At the meeting, Priti Patel promised to help necessary sectors for the development of the country while Britain is currently assisting in Myanmar's agriculture, education, monetary and poverty reduction. Aung San Suu Kyi sought further help from Britain for Myanmar's education, health, vocational training, human resource development and creation of job opportunities. She also held talks with the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon John Bercow MP in Westminster on 12 September. They discussed the Myanmar government's efforts for peace and national reconciliation

¹ U.S Sanction to be Lifted: Positive changes for Myanmar during State counsellor's meeting with Obama – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/15_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 15 September 2016 (p. 1&4)/ State Counsellor Meets US VP, Secretary of State – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/16_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 16 September 2016 (p. 1)/ State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets with US Congressional Leaders – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/17_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 17 September 2016 (p. 1)/ Historic Partnership: US and Myanmar Agree to Game-Changing Initiatives – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/16_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 16 September 2016 (p. 1&3)

in Myanmar and the Rakhine State issue. She also visited the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS), where she met the Commander of Joint Forces Command General Sir Christopher Deverell and Sir Tom Phillips, Commandant of RCDS. Aung San Suu Kyi attended a luncheon hosted by Britain's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and exchanged views on ways for promoting bilateral relations, opportunities for further investment by Britain in Myanmar and promoting bilateral cooperation in the agriculture, health and education sectors.²

STATE COUNSELLOR MEETS CHINESE CENTRAL MILITARY COMMISSION VICE CHAIRMAN

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi received the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission General Xu Qiliang of the People's Republic of China in Yangon on 9 September and discussed matters relating to further relations and cooperation between the two Defence Services. General Xu Qiliang said that the State Counsellor's recent goodwill visit to China had strengthened bilateral relations between the two countries and that the purpose of his visit to Myanmar is to cement bilateral ties and highlight the importance of people-to-people connectivity and cooperation between the two Defence Services.³

STATE COUNSELLOR AND FORMER UN SECRETARY GENERAL KOFI ANNAN ATTEND RAKHINE STATE ADVISORY COMMISSION

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi held a meeting in Yangon on 5 September with the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Commission Chairman Kofi Annan, the Founder and Chairman of the Kofi Annan Foundation. In her address, the State Counsellor said that the issue of Rakhine State is the most important matter for all, stressing the need to seek a solution to ensure stability and development of the country and expressed confidence that the commission chairman and members will help find solutions to the issue. Commission Chairman and former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said that he was pleased to be part of the country's transition period, expressing his belief that the commission can offer suggestions that will help Myanmar achieve peace and prosperity in the future. The State Counsellor Office released a statement on 24 August which stated that the government was committed to finding lasting solutions to the complex and delicate issues in Rakhine State and that an advisory Commission on Rakhine State would be established. The 9-member advisory Commission is chaired by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations. The commission also includes 3 international and 6 national persons of eminence who are highly experienced, respected and neutral individuals, added the statement. The Chairman and party visited Sittwe, Rakhine State, on 6 September and held meetings with Rakhine State Ministers, departmental officials, town elders and responsible persons from civil society organizations. Kofi Annan and members of the Advisory Commission also visited Islamic schools and camps of internally displaced persons in Sittwe on 7 September. Kofi Annan also paid courtesy calls on President Htin Kyaw and Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 September and discussed the situation in the Rakhine State and exchanged views on the 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in his meeting with Kofi Annan, urged the Commission Chairman to take into consideration the history of the issue in their review and

² Going to the 71st UNGA: State Counsellor leaves for United Kingdom and United States – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/11_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 11 September 2016 (p. 1)/
State Counsellor in London, meets with Myanmar Ambassadors – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/12_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 12 September 2016 (p. 1 &3)/
British PM to State Counsellor "Delighted with Democracy in Myanmar" – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/14_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 14 September 2016 (p. 1 &3)/
State Counsellor meets with House of Commons Speaker – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/13_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 13 September 2016 (p. 1)

³ State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets Chinese Central Military Commission Vice Chairman – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/10_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 10 September 2016 (p. 1)

proceed with caution, pledging the army's help with the commission's mission. The tension over the Rakhine issue is due to religious provocation rather than religion itself, the commander-in-chief said, stressing that the Rakhine people are very sensitive to the issue and stressed the importance to the inclusion of Rakhine nationals in finding a solution, calling for the need to take heed of citizenship, national solidarity and democratic rights. Kofi Annan expressed his gratitude for the insight into the history of the issue, reaffirming that his panel would only provide suggestions after meetings with stakeholders and the two communities in the region. The former UN chief promised his commission would undertake a comprehensive review of regional development apart from the issue of citizenship eligibility. He called for the continued citizenship scrutiny process as the law stands. He heard respective concerns from both communities during his tour of Rakhine State. In a press conference held on 8 September Kofi Annan stated that his government-appointed commission is not meant to probe into human rights in the state, but to give recommendations to ease the stress and anxiety in Rakhine State. Kofi Annan also expressed the 9-member commission's commitment to "impartiality" to advise the government in order to solve complicated issues in accordance with international norms. He also acknowledged the significance of the commission because among its members are international experts. The former UN chief has also called for cooperation among neighbouring countries to address the issue in Rakhine State, urging the countries to consider how they can improve the cross-border issues by border management and pledged that the commission would observe cross-border issues and advise the countries to cooperate out of necessity. The Chairman also stated that the Commission's recommendations will mainly focus on ways of solving the communal tension, providing humanitarian aid, reconciliation and development. The commission listened to both communities, with the former UN chief pledging a submission of a comprehensive report of its findings to the government in a one-year timeframe, as agreed with the government.⁴

UNION JOINT CEASEFIRE MONITORING COMMITTEE HOLDS MEETING

The 7th Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee-Union Level meeting took place in Yangon on 13 September with discussions on works to form JMC-State Level (Kayin-2) in Bago Region which is expected to begin this month. Chairman of the JMC-U Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Vice Chairman 1 Saw Isaac Po and Vice Chairman 2 U Ko Ko Gyi extended greetings on the first day of the meeting set to last for three days. During the 3-day meeting, the formation of another JMC-S in Chin State this December, a report on the interim Technical Secretariat Centre of JMC, discussions on work guidelines for 2 secretaries of JMC-U, duties and responsibilities of an executive director and a deputy executive director, matters related to demarcation and demining and the presence of international experts are also set to be discussed. An agreement was reached to open up to 6 offices in ceasefire areas, according to the 2nd Day session of the Union Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC-U). Four Region/State Level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committees have been opened in Shan State, Taninthari Region, Kayin State and Mon State, with plans to open 2 more in Bago Region and Chin State.

⁴ Solving the Rakhine Issue: State Counsellor, Kofi Annan Convene Advisory Commission – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/6_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 6 September 2016 (p. 1)/ Rakhine state advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan arrive in Sittwe – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/7_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 7 September 2016 (p. 1 &3)/ Former UN Chief Visits Islamic Schools, IDP Camps in Sittwe – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/8_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 8 September 2016 (p. 1 &2)/ President U Htin Kyaw meets with Kofi Annan – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/9_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 9 September 2016 (p. 1)/ Commander-in-Chief meets former UN chief, urges caution on Rakhine issue – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/9_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 9 September 2016 (p. 9)/ Erasing Rakhine Tension: Kofi Annan calls for cooperation among neighbouring countries to address Rakhine Issue – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/9_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 9 September 2016 (p. 1 &3)

According to JMC-U's Secretary-1 Dr Shwe Khar, offices will be opened in Taungoo of Bago Region in October and in Haka of Chin State in November. The discussions included the meeting between the JMC-U and the United Nations and the demarcation of territories. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) finances the committee to conduct its peacemaking activities, with an official estimating that the committee would need US\$100,000 to continue its work until the end of this year. In connection with demarcation, the Tatmadaw will make discussions with ethnic armed organisations under the supervision of the Union Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee. The committee is planning to include civil society organisations in the process. Tatmadaw representatives proposed to set Kayin State as a pilot area for removing landmines at the 3rd day. Representatives of the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) agreed to the proposal, offering to discuss it again at the 8th meeting which is slated to be held in November. "After reaching an agreement over the proposal for the pilot demining area, the Tatmadaw and EAOs agreed to work together toward their complete removal." said the Secretary of the JMC-U Col Wunna Aung. With technical assistance from abroad, the Tatmadaw and signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement will now carry out the removal of landmines together at a time when trust between the two sides reached the highest point in almost six decades. "We will give priority to areas where internationally displaced people will return. There will be no obstacles to removing the mines there." said Saw Isaac Po of the KNU/KNLA.⁵

POLITICAL DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK REVIEWED FOR NATIONAL-LEVEL DIALOGUE

The 5th Meeting on Reviewing the Framework for the Political Dialogue was held in Yangon on 16 September, taking one more step into laying down the framework for the dialogues. Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for holding the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong, Dr Tin Myo Win, said the *national level political dialogues* are expected to begin in October within the framework. The Secretary of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee Pado Saw Kwel Htoo Win, said the launch of the *national-level political dialogues* would represent "all-inclusiveness" with opinions and voices of the peoples including ethnic peoples. The participants reached an agreement regarding Chapter 4 of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and discussed Chapter 5 on 16 September. The Framework for Political Dialogue was reviewed on 17 September as part of the ongoing efforts to organise national-level political dialogues this year. Union Political Dialogue Joint Committee Secretary Dr Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong said the meeting focused on what sections of the agenda should be treated ethnically, regionally and topically at the launch of the national-level political dialogue. Lian Sakhong said, participants at the meeting agreed to make no change to the 5 sectors and 10 points included in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The outcomes of the *national-level dialogue* will be discussed at the Union Political Dialogue Joint Committee, whose final outcomes will be brought to the Union Peace Conference for further discussion. A 9-member work committee has been formed to begin the *national-level dialogue*, with 3 representatives each from the government, political parties and ethnic armed organisations. The *national-level dialogue* is expected to commence in January as the Union Peace Conference is reportedly scheduled for February. According to Dr Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong, plans are underway to hold the first *national-level dialogue* this year. The meeting was attended by 15 representatives from the government, 16 representatives from the signatories to the NCA and 15 representatives from the political parties and agreed on NCA-based points that would pave the way for the *National-level Political Dialogue*, Dr Tin Myo Win said. In his opening remarks the Chairman of

⁵ Union Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee Meets to form Sub-Committee in Bago Region – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/14_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 14 September 2016 (p. 2)/
JMC plans to open more offices in ceasefire areas – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/15_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 15 September 2016 (p. 4)/
Tatmadaw proposes removal of landmines in Kayin State – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/16_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 16 September 2016 (p. 3)

the Preparatory Committee said the Delegation for Political Negotiation-DPN did not attend the meeting as they have not yet finished their discussion.⁶

(Note: The *National-level Dialogue* referred to here are the *Amyotha-Asint* Dialogues or in other words, dialogue at the State and Regional levels which can be issue-based, ethnic-based or territory-based. The Union Peace Conference 21st Century Panglong is the actual national-level dialogue.)

TATMADAW LAUNCH OPERATIONS AGAINST KKO (DKBA) SPLINTER GROUP IN WAH BOH TAUNG-KYONHTAW, METHAWAW REGIONS

Tatmadaw (the military) carried out 'combined operations' from 11 to 15 September on a motorway from Myaing Gyi Ngu to Methawaw in Karen State, an area of the Klo Htoo Baw Karen Organisation (KKO) splinter group led by Kyaw Thet and San Aung. There were 13 skirmishes. It is reported that on 29 August the Tatmadaw's Border Guard Force had clashed with a group led by Nar Ma Kyar who kidnapped five villagers and took away two elephants. Nar Ma Kyar was killed in the clash. The group had apparently launched mine attacks on a military convoy carrying food between Kyondoe and Kawkareik on 21 August. Likewise, the group is said to have exploded mines near the Mahar Hpa-an garment factory in Hpa-an. They then released statement 3/2016 which the Tatmadaw claims declared war against the State and the Tatmadaw, and shelled Tatmadaw troops on Yinn Paing bridge on the Myaing Gyi Ngu-Methawaw motorway on 3 September and conducted mine attacks, fired heavy artillery at Tatmadaw and BGF bases and exploded mines at Kawkareik fire station from 4 to 8 September. Furthermore, although the regional government and Tatmadaw gave warnings to the KKO splinter group several times, the group failed to respond. According to the Tatmadaw, aside from the alleged extortion, the group also disturbed motorcades of the Kayin State Chief Minister and the Commander. The Tatmadaw claims that it is strictly adhering to the terms of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in carrying out the operations. According to the Tatmadaw it has provided health care services and relief supplies to 3,874 local people who fled the areas where clashes broke out and who are now in Myaing Gyi Ngu region where they were temporarily accommodated.⁷

66 CHILD SOLDIERS DISCHARGED AND RETURNED TO PARENTS

66 child soldiers have been discharged and returned to their respective parents under the supervision of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army) and the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on grave violations against children (CTFMR). The ceremony took place in Yangon and attended by Brig-Gen Khun Thant Zaw Htoo and senior military officers of the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (Army), officials from related ministries and United Nations agencies. Brig-Gen Khun Thant Zaw Htoo and CTFMR's Co-Chair Renata Lok-Dessalien, spoke on the occasion. The released children were given certificates of resignation and citizenship scrutiny cards before being returned to the parents and guardians and assistance will also be given to those wishing to continue their education and those wishing to work. The armed forces have so far returned 810 minor soldiers to their parents in 13 batches since 2012- once in 2012, 3 times in 2013, 4 times in 2014, 3 times in 2015 and 2 times this year. The country signed the 18-month project of the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on grave violations against children (UNCTFMR) on 27 June 2012, extending the period of the project for six months each in 2013 and 2014. The Tatmadaw has taken action against 81 military officers and 402 personnel of other ranks in connection with the recruitment of children up to August 2016. The Tatmadaw has stated that they are making earnest

⁶ Peace makers discuss national level political dialogues –
file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/17_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 17 September 2016 (p. 3)/
Talk at the National Level: Political dialogue framework reviewed for national-level dialogue –
file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/18_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 18 September 2016 (p. 1)

⁷ Tatmadaw launch operations against KKO splinter group in Wah Boh Taung-Kyonhtaw, Methawaw regions –
file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/17_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 17 September 2016 (p. 3)

efforts to ensure that children are not recruited and that any children currently serving in the military are discharged.⁸

ANALYSIS

The visits to the United Kingdom and the U.S. by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi can be seen as a shift in shaping Myanmar's ties with the West. However, the visit by China's Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission General Xu Qiliang to Myanmar is a stark reminder that the 'special phauk-phaw' Sino-Myanmar relations remains unchanged and that it will remain a key ally for Myanmar. How Myanmar implements its foreign relations with its northern neighbour and the West will indeed be pivotal to the democratic transition taking place in the country. The NLD needs assistance from both quarters in implementing its political, economic and social policies. It therefore will be very important how Myanmar will strike a right balance in implementing its foreign policy.

⁸ Turn in Your Chevrons: 66 Child soldiers Discharged returned to parents – file:///C:/Users/resea/AppData/Local/Temp/10_Sept_16_gnlm.pdf (GNLM) 10 September 2016 (p. 1)