
POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 15

OFFICIAL MEDIA

2nd ROUND OF PEACE TALKS HELD BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND RCSS/SSA

The 2nd Union level peace talks between Union Peace-making Work Committee and Rehabilitation Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) were held at the Triangle Region Command in Kengtung, Eastern Shan State on 19 May and ended with the signing of a 12-point agreement. Those present were Vice-Chairmen of the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) Commander in Chief (Army) General Soe Win and U Aung Min Minister for Rail Transportation. The RCSS/SSA side was led by Chairman U Ywat Sit. The leaders held discussions on making peace and implementing joint activities on combating narcotic drugs.¹

Unofficial: The salient points of the agreement include the release of RCSS/SSA prisoners, the formation of a peace-monitoring group by July 2012, assistance to the group in promoting Shan culture and to hold political consultations with individuals, groups and communities throughout the country.² Please see Annex A for (an unofficial version of) the agreement.

BURMESE FM MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE US

Foreign Affairs Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin made an official visit to Washington, DC from 16 to 17 May 2012 at the invitation of the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin met Secretary Clinton and held a joint press conference at the State Department, where she reaffirmed the continued support of the US on the initiatives and changes taking place in Burma and announced the nomination of Ambassador Derek Mitchell as the 1st new US ambassador to Burma since 1990. The Burmese FM also met Senators John McCain, Mitch McConnell (Chairman - Subcommittee for East Asia & Pacific Affairs of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations) and Jim Webb, as well as other government officials. The Senators voiced their support for the Burmese government's on-going reform process as well as for the promotion of bilateral relations. Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin updated the Senators on recent political, economic and social developments in Burma as well as on the peace building efforts with the ethnic armed groups. He also met with Deputy Secretary of State William J Burns and had a frank and cordial exchange of views on the promotion of bilateral cooperation.³

FM ATTENDS HIGH-LEVEL DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD ECONOMY

Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin attended and delivered a statement at the High-level Thematic Debate on the State of the World Economy at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 18 May at the invitation of the UNSG and President of the UNGA. He spoke about the country's transition to democracy and current political, economic and social reforms and urged a stronger multilateral approach in tackling the current global economic crisis. The FM also called on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and discussed cooperation between Burma and the UN, as well

¹ Second Union level peace talks between Union Peace-making Work Committee and RCSS/SSA held – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-05-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 May 2012 (p. 1 & 8)

² The 12 point agreement– http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4676:the-12-point-agreement&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 23 May 2012

³ Union Foreign Affairs Minister pays official visit to the United States of America – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-05-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 May 2012 (p. 8) / Remarks With Foreign Minister of Burma U Wunna Maung Lwin After Their Meeting - <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/05/190260.htm> (U.S. Department of State) 17 May 2012

as development assistance programs to be carried out by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He also attended a roundtable discussion on Burma organized by the Council on Foreign Relations and explained developments taking place in Burma, including the national reconciliation process and improvement of socio-economic conditions.⁴

UEC CHAIRMAN MEETS POLITICAL PARTIES FROM BY-ELECTIONS

Union Election Commission (UEC) Chairman U Tin Aye met with the political parties who had participated in the April by-elections on 22 May, where he guaranteed that the commission would take the necessary measures and review the shortcomings of the elections and ensure that the next elections scheduled for 2015 would be more free and fair. He pointed out that the international election monitors who observed the elections were satisfied with the arrangements and that the by-elections were a free and fair. The Chairman called on the parties to cooperate with the Commission to prepare for the next elections. The participants discussed the negative and positive aspects of the by-elections and UEC Secretary U Win Ko offered clarifications.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

5 NLD MEMBERS ARRESTED IN POWER SHORTAGE DEMONSTRATIONS IN PYI

Burmese police arrested 5 National League for Democracy (NLD) members in a protest against electrical power shortages in Pyi on 24 May and were taken in custody for questioning and some NLD members were also briefly detained for questioning in Mandalay according to a senior NLD official. During the previous three days of demonstrations, authorities had been cooperating with marchers who have taken to the streets in Rangoon, Mandalay and other cities in protest to a drastic loss of electrical power. The security forces had allowed the peaceful demonstrations to continue, and government officials said they were doing everything they could to increase the electricity supply. According to the NLD, some 400 people demonstrated around the Pyi area (260 km/160 miles northwest of Rangoon), which the police tried to disperse, but there was some rough manhandling and some people were injured. The government said it would take up to two weeks to return to normalcy in providing power supplies.⁶

BURMESE WORKERS FORM LABOUR UNION IN THAILAND (THREE PAGODAS PASS)

Burmese workers in the Thai-Burma border town of Three Pagodas Pass have formed a labour union for the first time on 22 May. Wai Phyo, the chairman of the newly established union, said that Burmese workers were being unfairly treated and that their salary and working hours were different from Thai counterparts. He added that the newly established labour union has 30 members and that membership is expected to grow. Currently there are about 40 factories in the area employing 5,000 workers. The majority of the Burmese workers live on the Burma side and travel daily across the border. The average daily wage for Burmese is said to be around 85 and 130 Baht. Wai Phyo said that his organization plans to cooperate with Thai labour unions in order to promote equal rights for Burmese workers in the Three Pagoda Pass region.⁷

⁴ Union Foreign Affairs Minister attends High-level Thematic Debate on State of World Economy – <http://www.mrtv3.net.mm/newspaper/235newsn.pdf> (NLM) 23 May 2012 (p. 16)

⁵ UEC meets parties participated in 2012 by-elections – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-05-23.pdf> (NLM) 23 May 2012 (p. 1)

⁶ NLD members detained in demonstrations in Pyi – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/7184-nld-members-detained-in-demonstrations-in-pyi.html> (Mizzima) 24 May 2012

⁷ Burmese Workers Form Labour Union in Three Pagodas Pass – <http://www.kaowao.org/2012news-May-23.php> (Kaowao) May 23, 2012

DKBA WAITING FOR NATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE

Officials from the Kloh Htoo Bar faction of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have said that they expect the government to convene a national conference with the armed ethnic groups on a more detailed political agenda. The DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in November 2011 and a more detailed agreement was signed the following month. However, DKBA Colonel Saw Lu Lu said that since the deal was signed, they had seen little in the way of development in their region and felt that the government was slow in moving the peace process ahead. The group plans to bring up the issues of human rights and self-administration during the next round of negotiations. Colonel San Aung, the head of the DKBA's Intelligence Bureau, stated that regional development projects being implemented in the DKBA controlled areas have been carried out with their own funds and without the support of any foreign donors or NGOs.⁸

ANALYSIS

The 19 May ceasefire agreement signed between with government and the RCSS was another significant landmark in the ongoing peace process. The new structure of the UPWC means that regional commanders of the Burmese Army were also present at the talks and the Shan party was also allowed to bring advisors and observers. It is hoped that this inclusive approach will help support wider ownership of the peace process and a more coordinated government approach.

US-Burma relations have been put back on track with the announcement by the US government of its nomination of a US ambassador to Burma. The restoration of relations between the two countries has been greeted in both Washington and Nay Pyi Taw as a positive step in the right direction, though to some extent coupled with opposition and scepticism. President Obama's decision to re-engage with the government in Nay Pyi Taw will provide more leverage to both sides in their dealings with the Burma's northern neighbour China. As it seeks to assert its sphere of influence in the region, the US will no doubt look to the Burmese leadership as a new ally to deter Chinese hegemony. However, Beijing will surely counter by providing more aid and assistance to the Burmese government in a bid to maintain the special "Phauk-phaw friendship". No doubt both Washington and Beijing will closely monitor the developments taking place in Burma over the coming months.

⁸ DKBA waiting for national peace conference –
<http://www.mmmtimes.com/2012/news/627/news18.html> (Myanmar Times) May 21 - 27, 2012

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

**The 12 point agreement
between
the Union level Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC)
&
The Restoration Council of Shan State / Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA)
19 May 2012
*Unofficial version***

Note: *The official version of this agreement deals with military matters in several pages. Even the SHAN editor, who was there as a consultant, has not been given a copy. The following is therefore a summary and not word by word translation of the agreement.*

1. The RCSS/SSA plan to cooperate in the eradication of illicit drugs is heartily received by the UPWC to be forwarded to the President for consideration
2. The two sides will conduct a joint field survey
3. The government will assist families of the RCSS/SSA members to earn adequate means of livelihood
4. The government will assist the RCSS/SSA in the preservation and promotion of Shan literature and culture
5. The RCSS/SSA is permitted to request assistance from and coordinate with NGOs and INGOs
6. The RCSS/SSA will be allowed to register its Tai Freedom news agency after the new media law comes into effect
7. Members and supporters of RCSS/SSA who are in prison will be released except for those who have been imprisoned on criminal charges
8. A peace monitoring group will be formed before the end of July 2012 after nomination by the two sides of suitable persons
9. The two sides will continue to build up mutual trust to enable the RCSS/SSA to be totally withdrawn from the list of unlawful associations
10. A special industrial zone will be set up in the area controlled by the RCSS/SSA
11. The RCSS/SSA is free to hold political consultations with individuals, groups and communities throughout the country
12. National ID cards will be issued to members, family members and people residing with the RCSS/SSA⁹

⁹ The 12 point agreement–
http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4676:the-12-point-agreement&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 23 May 2012