

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 28

OFFICIAL MEDIA

AUNG SAN SUU KYI RECEIVES CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

Chairwoman of the Pyithu Hluttaw Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received the Congressional Gold Medal (the highest award for civilians presented by the US Congress) at a ceremony on 19 September. Those present included US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former First Lady Laura Bush, US House and Senate leaders, Minister at the President's Office U Aung Min and Burma's envoy to the Washington U Than Swe. In her acceptance speech, Suu Kyi said that the current reforms were made possible by President Thein Sein, and she expressed her belief over future processes of reform and national reconsolidation. She added that she would continue with joint efforts to build a democratic society which would ensure unity and peace while also promoting the interests of the country and its people. She also met Secretary Clinton and gave a speech at the US Institute of Peace on 18 September, where she expressed her support to further ease sanctions and that Burma should not depend on US sanctions to maintain the momentum of democratic changes, rather that the contributions and participation of the Burmese people themselves are crucial to the process.¹

GOVERNMENT GRANTS AMNESTY

The Burmese government granted amnesty to 514 more prisoners including foreigners, according to an announcement made in the state-run media on 18 September. The order said that the move is taken out of consideration of ensuring stability, making eternal peace, national reconciliation of the country and enabling all to participate in political process as well as out of humanitarian grounds.²

Unofficial: According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), among the 514 released, 90 are said to be political prisoners. Similarly 83 Thai and 114 Bangladeshi nationals were also released as goodwill gesture and friendship.³

EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSES TO REINSTATE TRADE PREFERENCES TO BURMA

Burma is set to benefit once again from a special, advantageous trade arrangement with the EU following recognition by the international community of the country's recent democratization efforts and changes. The European Commission adopted a proposal on 17 September to bring Burma back under the so-called 'Everything But Arms' preferential trade regime which would grant duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market for all Burmese products except for arms and ammunitions. Under the EU's 'Generalized System of Preferences', Burmese products would be provided tariff preference on the EU market. EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said "Since Burma started to open up earlier this year, I saw the need to underpin such deep and important changes with real economic support once key improvements for the workforce had been met. Trade is fundamental to supporting political stability and the EU's trade preferences mean we will give this reform-minded country priority access to the world's largest market." The EU believes the unprecedented developments now mean the time is right for Europe to open a new chapter in Burma. In June 2012, the International Labour Organization (ILO) concluded that significant progress had been achieved by Burma. Therefore, the EU law foresees that preferences should be reinstated. The proposal will be submitted simultaneously to the Council and the European Parliament (EP) for agreement. The current GSP scheme is set to expire on 31 December 2013 with the new scheme due to enter into force on 1 January 2014 and will provide additional export opportunities including the Least-Developed Countries (LDCs).⁴

¹ Nation-building task of Myanmar made possible by the reform measures instituted by President U Thein Sein / Daw Aung San Suu Kyi delivers an address at ceremony to accept Congressional Gold Medal – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 September 2012 (p. 16)

² Amnesty granted – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 September 2012 (p. 16)

³ Burma Releases 83 Thais – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/14295> (Irrawaddy) 18 September 2012 / 114 Bangladeshi Prisoners Released From Sittwe Prison – <http://www.narinjara.com/main/index.php/114-bangladeshi-prisoners-released-from-sittwe-prison/> (Narinjara) 18 September 2012

⁴ Unprecedented developments of Myanmar now mean the time is right to open new chapter / European Commission proposal would grant Myanmar duty-free access and quota-free access to European market for all products –

PRESIDENT IN CHINA FOR 9TH ASEAN-CHINA EXPO, OFFICIAL VISIT

President Thein Sein left for China on 18 September for an official visit and to attend the official opening of the 9th China-ASEAN Expo and the 9th ASEAN-China Business and Investment Summit in Nanning, Guanxi Province on 21 September. The opening of the Expo was attended by Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping, Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Tan Dung, representatives from ASEAN nations, Guanxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Governor Ma Biao and officials. The President said in his opening address that progress had been made in the China-ASEAN relations since 1991, and that the 9th China-ASEAN Expo plays a crucial role in implementing the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area. The Expo has been held in Nanning since 2004 with the aim of enabling people of China and the ASEAN to enjoy the fruits of trade. At the ASEAN-China Business and Investment Summit, he re-affirmed the need for closer cooperation between ASEAN and China in promoting stability and development in the region and beyond. During his visit, he was also awarded an honorary doctorate by the Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University for his poverty alleviation efforts in the country through a rural development scheme.⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC NATIONALITIES DEVELOP THEIR OWN PEACE PLAN

During a 3-day conference held from 14 to 16 September near the Thai-Burma border, 130 ethnic political leaders and representatives from civil society and armed ethnic groups designed a 6-point “political roadmap”⁶ as an alternative to President Thein Sein’s 8-point peace plan. “We would not like to go along with the government’s peace plan, especially points 5 through 8. It forces us to accept ‘negotiated surrender.’ For this reason, we had to convene this conference to gather all the voices of ethnic people,” said Nai Hong Sar, a member of the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC). The WGEC, which includes experts and key leaders from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and the Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC), was the primary organizer for the conference, during which ethnic people were invited to express their concerns about the government’s peace plan. Armed ethnic groups also conveyed particular dissatisfaction with the plan’s requirement that they form political parties and enter parliament before being able to alter the 2008 Constitution.

The participants also designed a 3-step alternative peace plan and a 6-point road map addressing peace talks. The 3-phase peace plan includes: 1) ceasefire, 2) implementation of ceasefire agreements (instead of “development as proposed by the government) and 3) political dialogue. The fifth step of the roadmap stipulates the need for an ethnic-wide, Panglong-style conference to allow political parties, ethnic representatives, and government leaders to discuss how to establish a “genuine union” that guarantees the rights of all ethnic people. On the final day of the meeting, ethnic representatives discussed the ongoing conflicts in Karen, Arakan, and Kachin States, the latter of which having caused more than 90,000 people to flee their homes due to fighting between the Burmese Army and Kachin forces.⁷ (*Please see the Appendixes for the full text of the conference statement and the 6-point road map*).

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 September 2012 (p. 16) /

Press release: European Commission proposes to reinstate trade preferences to Myanmar/Burma -

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/12/971&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (European Commission) 17 September 2012

⁵ President U Thein Sein leaves for China to attend 9th ASEAN-China Expo –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 September 2012 (p. 1) /

President U Thein Sein attends opening of 9th China-ASEAN Expo –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-22.pdf> (NLM) 22 September 2012 (p. 1 & 8) /

Closer cooperation key to win-win development: President U Thein Sein –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-09-22.pdf> (NLM) 22 September 2012 (p. 1)

⁶ ENC: The Six-point Political Program of the Ethnic Nationalities Regarding the Peace Process (*Burmese*) – 21 September 2012

⁷ Ethnic Nationalities Develop Their Own Peace Plan –

<http://monnews.org/?p=4044> (IMNA) 18 September 2012 /

Alternative peace roadmap approved by Ethnic Nationalities Conference –

http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4958:alternative-peace-roadmap&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (Shan Herald) 20 September 2012

KIO SAYS IT WON'T GO TO NAYPYITAW FOR PEACE TALKS

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has rejected an invitation from the Burmese government to hold peace talks in Naypyidaw, saying it would be “impossible” to meet in the country’s capital while its own headquarters remains under siege. “We have already informed them [the government] that it is impossible to hold peace talks in a government-controlled area as long as this situation continues,” said KIO spokesperson La Nan, referring to fighting near Laiza, where the group is based. Recently, Minister at the President’s Office Aung Min sent a letter to the KIO on 25 August to invite them to hold the next round of talks in Naypyitaw. La Nan added that although Aung Min implied the offer had come directly from President Thein Sein, the KIO has yet to receive an invitation from the President. Aung Min has said that while he is willing to meet the KIO in any location, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese Armed Forces General Soe Win, who accompanies him during his negotiations with armed groups, could not do so due to certain limitations. He added that the KIO had asked him to withdraw Burmese army 40 units from KIO territory, and that he conveyed the request to the relevant military commanders. However the noted that it was not in his power to tell the army what to do, as he has no control over military matters. Earlier proposals to hold peace talks in Bhamo and Muse by the government and Loijay by the KIO have been rejected by both sides.⁸

ANALYSIS

The news coverage in the Burmese state-run media on Aung San Suu Kyi receiving the Congressional Gold Medal is a sign of progress and changes taking place inside Burma. In the past, news of Suu Kyi was rarely given space in the state-run media, but since becoming an MP and assuming the role of Chairwoman of the Rule of Law Committee of the Lower House she has received wider state media coverage. More significantly, the presence of Minister Aung Min at the ceremony can be regarded as recognition from the Burmese government of Suu Kyi’s achievement while also reiterating the crucial role which she is playing in the on-going national reconciliation process.

This is a reminder that in such a diverse situation, the inclusion of all stakeholders irrespective of race, religion and background is vital to achieve peace and stability. Furthermore, broader representation and the inclusion of all stakeholders should not only be limited to attending international meetings and conferences but also to other areas including peace-talks and other efforts contributing to promoting peace and development to the country.

⁸ KIO Says it Won’t Go to Naypyidaw for Talks – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/14422> (Irrawaddy) 19 September 2012

Appendix A:

Statement of the Ethnic Nationalities 2012 Conference

16 September 2012

1. The grand Ethnic Nationalities Conference, with the aim of involvement and establishing a united common position of the various ethnic nationality organizations in the internal peace process, which is central to the reforms in Burma today, was held successfully from September 14 to 16, 2012 at a place in the liberated area. The conference was attended by over 130 representatives from the ethnic nationality organizations based inside, outside and abroad, and it was able to lay down precise and firm programs for the future, after free and frank discussions.
2. Though U Thein Sein Union government has reached with most of the armed ethnic nationality organizations, the basic ceasefire agreement, which is a preliminary stage in the peace process, there remains a negotiation for "political dialogue" for reaching a "political agreement." Since the 8-point union-level peace process, laid down by the Union government in advance, cannot realize just and genuine peace, this conference has to lay down the 6-point ethnic nationalities' political process relating to peace. The political dialogue must be initiated by discussions on the two peace processes.
3. We believe that the building of national unity and the prevention of that unity from disintegration are the principal duties of all the ethnic nationalities, including the Burman ethnic nationality. Accordingly, for the successful execution of that duty, it is necessary for all the ethnic nationalities to meet regularly for discussion and dialogue, inside and outside of the country.
4. This Conference adopts the resolution to raise the role of the Civil Society, including women and youths, in every stage of peace building work.
5. This Conference demands the government to announce nationwide ceasefire, officially, for the sake of building trust in the peace building process.
6. We express our deep concern for the more than 90,000 war refugees in Kachin Land, due to military offensives by Burmese army troops, and also for the loss of many lives, limbs, homes and properties, due to riots in Rahkine Land, and this Conference demands the government to urgently resolve the problems.
7. This Conference unanimously agrees and adopts the points given below for the realization of just and genuine peace, in practice.
 - (a) Affirm the 3-stage peace plan of the ethnic nationalities.
 - (b) Affirm the 6-stage road map for the implementation of that plan.
 - (c) Laying down programs to continue organizing workshops on the different foundational pillars necessary for a federal union.
8. The present stage reached in the peace process is only consultation and dialogue between the armed ethnic resistance forces and the Union government. Accordingly, we hereby announce that this Conference has initiated the nationwide "Peace process of the ethnic nationalities" participated actively by the different classes of ethnic peoples and the community based organizations.⁹

⁹ Statement of 2012 Ethnic Nationalities Conference - http://euro-burma.eu/doc/Ethnic_Nationalities_Conference_Statement_-_EN_-_16.09.2012.pdf (Burmese) - (EBO website via the UNFC) 16 September 2012

Appendix B:

**The Six-point Political Program
of the Ethnic Nationalities Regarding the Peace Process**

1. To develop a “Framework for Political Dialogue” by organizing consultations amongst ethnic armed revolutionary groups, political parties and civil society including women and youth.
2. To hold consultations between representatives of the Union Government and ethnic armed revolutionary groups, to obtain agreement on a “Framework for Political Dialogue”. In doing so,
 - a) The consultations will be held in locations agreed to by both parties.
 - b) Impartial international monitoring group shall be established to oversee both the dialogue and the implementation of agreements, and the agreements will be jointly informed to the public through independent medias
3. After agreeing on the “Framework for Political Dialogue” between the Union Government and ethnic armed revolutionary groups, to organize conferences by States and Regions, as well as by ethnic nationalities, in order to consult on the political process.
4. To hold a nationwide “Ethnic Nationalities’ Conference” with representatives from ethnic armed revolutionary groups, political parties, civil society including women and youth, and experts and scholars.
5. To hold a Union Convention based on the Panglong spirit, with agreement by all parties, with equal number of representatives from the ethnic nationalities, democratic forces and the Union of Government. The agreement from the convention shall be signed as “The Union Accord on Ethnic Nationalities”.
6. To implement “The Union Accord on Ethnic Nationalities” within the agreed timeframe.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Six-point Political Program of the Ethnic Nationalities Regarding the Peace Process - http://euro-burma.eu/doc/The_Six-point_Political_Program_of_the_Ethnic_Nationalities_Regarding_the_Peace_Process.pdf (Burmese) – (EBO website via the ENC) 21 September 2012