

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.30

OFFICIAL MEDIA

MYANMAR LEADERS RECEIVE VISITING CHINESE VICE PREMIER

President Thein Sein received China's Vice President Li Yuanchao and party in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 December and the two leaders exchanged views on the China-Myanmar comprehensive strategic relationship, cooperation in the communications sector and the Kyaukpyu deep sea port project, equitable exchange of assistance, effective implementation of mutual agreements, enhanced investment in agriculture and other sectors, infrastructure development, people-to-people exchanges, cooperation in restoring peace and stability in the border area, and exchanges of visits of leaders of the two countries. The Chinese Vice-Premier also attended the Myanmar-China meeting held in Naypyitaw together with his Myanmar counterpart Vice President Sai Maukham and held discussions on the promotion of cultural exchange between China and Myanmar as well as raising relations and cooperation between China and ASEAN countries. The Chinese leader also held a separate meeting with the Speaker of the Union and Lower House Thura Shwe Mann and discussed collaboration between the two parliaments.¹

THE ELDERS GROUP MEET MYANMAR LEADERS

The Elders' delegation led by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, former Algerian Foreign Minister and UN Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and Pakistani Supreme Court Advocate and Pakistani human rights defender Hina Jilani paid a 4-day official visit to Myanmar from 14 to 18 December. During the visit, the Elders delegation held substantive discussions with President Thein Sein, Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Chairman of the Union Election Commission Tin Aye. During the discussion, UEC Chair Tin Aye said that the elections in 2015 would be transparent, free and fair and also gave clarification on wide range of issues including the gathering of voter's lists, educational campaigns, and cooperation with media, social organizations and political parties.

At the meeting with the Elders, the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said that Tatmadaw is striving for nationwide cease fire agreement and lasting peace with the ethnic groups amidst some challenges democratic reform processes. Ming Aung Hlaing and the Elders also discussed the on-going peace process as well as the role of Tatmadaw in the upcoming elections and state of affairs regarding the ethnic races in Myanmar.²

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN'S MONTHLY RADIO ADDRESS TO THE NATION

In his monthly address to the nation made on 2 December, President Thein Sein emphasised the need to adopt a conciliatory and unified approach in addressing the issues to successfully implement

¹ Myanmar, China to cooperate in Kyaukpyu deep sea port project –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 December 2014 (p.1)/

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker meets Vice President of PRC –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (p.3) /

Vice President U Nyan Tun holds talks with Chinese counterpart –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 December 2014 (p. 3)

² UEC, the Elders discuss arrangements for 2015 election –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (p.2) /

Commander-in-Chief receives Thai military delegation, The Elders –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (GNLM) 18 December 2014 (p.3)

and sustain the on-going reform process. He stated that Myanmar was still laying the foundation for sustaining reforms long-term, some have said that reforms have stalled or halted.

With respect to the peace building efforts, the President stated that despite recent armed clashes, the basic elements of nationwide peace are in place. All the ethnic armed groups have agreed to work towards signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement, and the Union Peace Working Committee and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) are continuing their discussions and agreement had been reached with ethnic armed groups to establish a federal union in the country.

President Thein Sein also cited disagreements and opposition to the National Education Law as well as Regulations and by-laws for the law, which had been passed by the Union Parliament. Regarding the matter, he urged for continued extensive and practical consultations to address disagreements and to draft regulations. In conclusion, the President called on all national forces to find common solutions to these challenges and reaffirmed his commitment to achieving peace, promoting economic development and building a better future for future generations.³

NORWEGIAN KING AND QUEEN PAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO MYANMAR

Norway's King His Majesty Harald V and official entourage began their 5-day official to Myanmar and were welcomed by President Thein on 30 November in Naypyitaw. At the official talks, the two sides discussed the improvement of bilateral ties, peace-making efforts, rehabilitation tasks during the post-conflict period, the reform process in Myanmar, environmental conservation and management of natural resources, the education sector, the energy sector, poverty alleviation programmes, the tourism industry, trade and investment and the general election. King Harald also met the Speaker of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw Thura Shwe Mann, the Chair of Pyithu Hluttaw Committee on Rule of Law, Peace and Tranquillity Aung San Suu Kyi and also gave a speech at Yangon University.

In his speech, the Norwegian King praised Myanmar in overcoming decades of fighting and in building a better future for the country and also pledged to continue to support the process of transformation in Myanmar. He also highlighted the need for the development of human resources and education for ensuring a prosperous future the Myanmar people. Regarding Myanmar's on-going peace process, King Harald said, "It takes time to build lasting and sustainable peace" and stressed the need of the commitment of all the people to the realization of the vision of a sustainable democratic state. Emphasizing Norway's long involvement in Myanmar development, the king said Norway's skills and technology will help Myanmar develop its economy, environmental conservation, rural electrification and increased access to sustainable energy. He also expressed his hope to expand business ties and economic cooperation between the two countries. During their stay in Myanmar Norway's King also met civil society organizations, to participate in the opening of Excellence for Greening/ASEAN Institute for Green Productivity a Norwegian funded project and also toured the ancient city of Bagan.⁴

³ Despite recent armed clashes, basic elements of nationwide peace are in place –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 December 2014 (p. 2)

⁴ Norwegian King and Queen arrive in Yangon –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 December 2014 (p. 1)/
President U Thein Sein welcomes Norwegian king with ceremony –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 December 2014 (p. 1 & 2)/
Thura U Shwe Mann meets Norwegian King –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 December 2014 (p. 3)/
Norway's King applauds Myanmar's determination to turn a difficult past into a hopeful future –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-03-red.pdf> (GNLM) 3 December 2014 (p. 1 & 2)/
Norwegian FM meets armed ethnic organizations, CSOs in Bago –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 December 2014 (p. 1 & 2/)

EU TO PROVIDE USD 900 MILLION TO MYANMAR

The European Union announced on Monday it will provide EUR 688 million (USD 900) to Myanmar over the period 2014-2020 to reinforce its support to the country's multiple transitions. The EU said in a press release that the funds will help to develop rural areas and agriculture, improve food and nutrition security, governance and the rule of law, support education and contribute to peace-building, reflecting the new partnership the EU and Myanmar have been building since 2011. According to the press release that underlines the EU's full commitment to boost the four focal areas of its cooperation, Myanmar will receive EUR 241 million each in the education sector and the area of rural development, agriculture and food and nutrition security. In support of democratic and institutional reforms, the EU plans to provide the country's sector of governance, rule of law and state capacity-building with EUR 96 million. Up to EUR 103 million has been allocated for helping promote lasting peace, security and stability in Myanmar, it said. "With this support over the next seven years, the EU will build on its on-going initiatives and continue to promote peace, inclusive growth, sustainable development and democratic governance for the benefit of all people in Myanmar," the press release added. In 2013, EU sanctions against Myanmar were lifted and the EU representative office opened here following the historic visits of President U Thein Sein to Norway, Finland, Austria, Belgium and Italy.⁵

MYANMAR, AUSTRALIA AGREE TO STRENGTHEN INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY TIES

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing received the Australian Ambassador to Myanmar Ms Bronte Moules on 16 December and exchanged views on further strengthening of ties between the two countries, and held discussions on security, peace, training, and developments in Myanmar. The Ambassador reaffirmed her country's support towards Myanmar's political reform, pledging better military cooperation between the two countries' armed forces to safeguard regional security, especially in Asia.⁶

ELECTION CHAIR BRIEFS US DIPLOMATS ON PREPARATIONS FOR 2015-ELECTIONS

At a meeting with US Ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell and U.S. State Department official Raymond Richhart in Nay Pyi Taw on 11 December, the Chairman of the Union Election Commission Tin Aye said that the commission will invite international observers to the general election scheduled to be held in late 2015. The UEC Chair also explained that the UEC has plans to conduct voter education trainings as it is cooperating with political parties, civil service organizations and media as part of efforts for holding the upcoming general election successfully. Tin Aye also explained the strategic plan (2014- 2015), which was drawn with assistance of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, for compiling voter lists and a pilot project for compiling and computerizing them. The UEC also plans to establish a server at its office to show the electoral process on internet so that voters can monitor it during the upcoming election, he added. Besides, the commission sought advice from political parties and CSOs to amend the by-laws relating to the election, Tin Aye said. The UEC is also working together with international supporting bodies such as the European Union, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy, the Asian Network for Free Elections, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute for the success of the 2015-elections.⁷

⁵ European Union to provide USD 900 million to Myanmar over 7 years –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 December 2014 (p. 3)

⁶ Myanmar, Australia agree to strengthen intergovernmental and military ties –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-17-red.pdf> (GNLM) 17 December 2014 (p. 2)

⁷ UEC Chairman, US diplomats hold talks on preparations for 2015-elections –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 December 2014 (p. 3)

UEC MEETS POLITICAL PARTIES FOR ELECTORAL PROCEDURES

The Union Election Commission (UEC) met political parties 15 December to discuss preparations for the 2015 General Election. The meeting focused on a drawing common ethical code for political parties, general equality in fielding candidates for the election and compiling lists of eligible voters. The commission chairman, Tin Aye, vowed to conduct the general election in a free, fair and transparent manner and also urged all political parties to draw up common and practical ethical codes, as in democratic countries, in line with existing laws. Tin Aye also highlighted the importance of gender equality, suggesting there should be more women candidates with good qualifications running in the election. The UEC has targeted the completion of compiling lists of eligible voters by July 2015 with the help of social organizations and political parties. UEC member Dr Daw Myint Kyi also discussed general equality, followed by an explanation on the activities of compiling lists of voters.⁸

SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING RECEIVES KNU CHAIRMAN AND PARTY

Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met Chairman of the Karen National Union (KNU), Saw Mutu Sae Po and party in Nay Pyi Taw on 29 November. Also present at the meeting were Chief of General Staff (Army, Navy and Air) General Hla Htay Win and senior military officers of the Commander-in-Chief Office, KNU General Secretary Pado Kwe Htoo Win, CEC members Saw Roger Khin and Pado Mahn Nyein Maung, Quartermaster-General Saw Isaac, Saw Htoo Htoo Lay, political and military adviser to the KNU Chairman, Pado Shwe Moun, Kawkareik district chairman, and officials. Both sides expressed their satisfaction with the ceasefire activities between Tatmadaw and KNU, stressed the need of realization of Tatmadaw's 6-point peace principle rather than strict adherence to it, agreed to the points needed to be amended in accord with the law regarding constitutional change and made a resolution to strive for ensuring peace between Tatmadaw and KNU.⁹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

NO NEED FOR 'FEDERAL' ARMY, SAYS MYANMAR MINISTER

Minister of the President's Office, Aung Min told a press conference that as the government has given rights under a federal union to the ethnic groups, there is no pressing need to establish a federal armed force. Speaking at a press conference held in Bago on 30 November, Minister Aung Min stated that Myanmar's military should actively seek to incorporate military personnel from all ethnic groups. He said that the armed forces and the union government come under the same umbrella according to the constitution. "The military body does its tasks from a security point of view while the government gives priority to the political point of view. In future these two points of views should be easily combined," the minister said.

Central Executive Committee member of the Karen National Union (KNU) Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung recently stated that the need for ethnic minority groups to co-ordinate with the government armed forces to establish a federal army. "In my view, I do not deny the need to establish federal armed forces. But we need to take adequate time for it, given that the country has suffered from fighting for the last 60 years," he said. Leader of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) Nai Han Thar said, "No federal rights have been given to us. [The government] should not do anything under the guise of federalism." Questions of the possible development of a federal armed force and the future deployment of military units are due to be discussed further at the next meeting of the

⁸ UEC meets political parties for electoral procedures –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-12-16-red.pdf> (GNLM) 16 December 2014 (p. 3)

⁹ Senior General Min Aung Hlaing receives KNU Chairman and party –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs20/GNLM2014-11-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 November 2014 (p. 3)

government's Union Peace-making Work Committee and the NCCT scheduled to take place in December.¹⁰

KAYAN NEW LAND PARTY PLOTS USDP DOWNFALL

The Kayan New Land Party will not contest next year's election but has offered to help political parties win votes to beat the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in Kayah State. Kayah State was the only one of Myanmar's 14 states and regions in which the USDP won all seats in the 2010 election. Secretary of the KNLP Colonel Saw Lwin said his group was hoping for a dramatically different result in 2015. "We will help any political party competing in our state in 2015 election to get more votes than the USDP. We will help the strong party in our region, whether it is the [National League for Democracy] or ethnic political parties," he said. He said the group hoped that removing the USDP's majority would lead to constitutional reform and the creation of a "real civilian government". "We will never compete in the election until a civilian government takes office. The current government is not democratic. Only after the constitution is amended will Myanmar be a democratic country," Saw Lwin said. The KNLP was established in 1960 and signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 1990 and unlike most other armed ethnic groups, it has not renewed its ceasefire agreement with the government.¹¹

SNLD CLAIMS 5,000 DEFECTORS HAVE JOINED PARTY

More than 5,000 members of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), including 12 MPs have defected to the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) since the beginning of this year. According to SNLD spokesperson Sai Lek, 9 SNDP MPs and more than 2,000 party members have switched sides since 30 November when the SNLD launched a tour of Shan State. "The aim of our campaign is to launch party offices in Mongnawng (northern Shan), Wan Chin and Tangyan townships, and that it was not aimed at lobbying SNDP member to defect," he said. "We hold public meetings to inform local residents about our policies and goals and among those in the audience have been many members from other parties."

Earlier this year, some 3,000 SNDP members from Mongton (southern Shan), Kyaukme, Mongyai, Nansang, Laihka, Mongkaung and Kehsi townships and 3 MPs defected to the SNLD. Of the 12 MPs who have joined the SNLD, 9 are from the regional parliament while the other 3 – representing Tangyang (eastern Shan), Mongkaung and Kehsi – have seats in the union parliament's lower house.

Sai Win Myat Oo, a former SNDP regional MP representing Mongton, said his defection was intended as part of a concerted campaign to pressure both parties into a merger. "I was an SNLD member back at the time of the 1990 elections, but joined the SNDP for the 2010 elections as the SNLD did not run," he said. "So essentially I'm switching back to my roots. My decision is based on the desire to see both parties merge and also signifies my support to the SNLD's 8 unit's policy."

The SNLD, led by Hkun Htun Oo, came second in the 1990 elections and is closely associated with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. The party was revived following Hkun Htun Oo's release from prison in 2012. It says it is looking to field 40 candidates in the 2015 elections. The

¹⁰ No need for 'federal' army, says Myanmar Minister – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/15389-government-says-no-to-a-federal-army> (Mizzima) 1 December 2014

¹¹ Kayan New Land Party plots USDP downfall – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/12403-kayan-new-land-party-plots-usdp-downfall.html> (Myanmar Times) 1 December 2014

SNDP, also known as the White Tiger party, is headed by Chairman Sai Ai Pao. It contested the 2010 elections when it won 3 seats in the upper house and 18 in the lower house of parliament.¹²

CONFLICT NEGOTIATION COMMITTEE INEFFECTIVE, SAYS KIO SPOKESMAN

The committee designed to defuse tensions between the Kachin Independence Organisation and the government has been called ineffective by KIO spokesperson La Nang. The Conflict Negotiation Committee, formed 28 May, has met monthly as a result of the agreement reached between the parties on 10 October, 2013. But La Nang has described the meetings as impotent, due to a lack of authority invested in the government negotiators to respond to the KIO's suggestions for conflict resolution. "Colonel Than Aung and his colleagues do not have the power to make decisions in the meeting, they say that they will submit a report to their superior officers, but the results of this are never seen," said the KIO spokesperson. La Nang claims the KIO have made suggestions in the meeting they believe would have avoided the loss of life on November 19, when 23 cadets were killed as the result of artillery fire from the Myanmar army. The KIO suggested both sides should appoint special liaison representatives in the conflict-prone areas, said La Nang.

"The Conflict Negotiation Committee seems to be ineffective. It is weak in implementing agreements, both sides have weaknesses, the government side's weaknesses are bigger," said Kachin peace advocate San Aung. He added an example of an agreement negotiated by the Conflict Negotiation Committee. If one side wants to undertake a military activity they must inform the other party, but San Aung says this agreement has not been adhered to.¹³

POLITICAL PARTIES DEMAND RESOLUTION OF LAND DISPUTES BEFORE NEXT ELECTION

Various political parties outlined land disputes between the government and citizens should be settled by the current government during a meeting with President Thein Sein. A meeting between the Union government ministers and the leaders of political parties was held at the office of the Yangon regional government on 26 November. The political parties presented reports on internal peace, the ceasefire process, political discussions and farmland disputes. "Nearly one year is left before the end of the term of President Thein Sein. The authorities are urged to take speedy measures to resolve the delayed farmland disputes and to end the unfair arrest and imprisonment of farmers," said Myanmar Farmers Development Party Vice Chair Maung Maung.

"The military chief ordered that the remaining vacant lands except the ones containing military buildings be given back to farmers. Similarly, Vice President Nyan Tun instructed that the lands confiscated by the government ministries should be returned to the farmers. However, the farmers have not received their lands back yet," Maung Maung said.

"Until now Myanmar farmers have faced economic difficulties, and development is still slow. Agricultural loans are available only to the farmers who own at ten acres. Farmers who own more than ten acres change their names to be able to get more agricultural loans. We must give sufficient loans to the farmers. Interest-free agricultural loans should be given out to farmers for the long term," said Daw Yin Yin San of the New Era People's Party. "The government allowed farmers to sell their farmlands, but not to pawn them, as there is no pawn law. Therefore, the farmers have had to take out loans from those running pawn business privately at high interest rates," she continued.

¹² SNLD claims 5,000 defectors have joined party – <http://www.dvb.no/news/snld-claims-5000-defectors-have-joined-party-burma-myanmar/46409> (DVB) 10 December 2014

¹³ Conflict Negotiation Committee ineffective, says KIO spokesman – <http://mizzima.com/mizzima-news/myanmar/item/15327-conflict-negotiation-committee-ineffective-says-kio-spokesman> (Mizzima) 29 November 2014

Some political parties presented reports on farmland disputes between companies and the local people and demanded immediate and effective action. “We would like to have these farmland disputes resolved in the current administration,” said Khin Maung Swe of the National Democratic Force Party.

Regarding the reports, President Thein Sein said that farmland disputes have been the most difficult issue to resolve since the start of his presidential term. “It is not easy for the government alone to solve the land disputes. Parliament is also responsible for that matter. The political parties need to work closely together with the people. The important issues will be handled during the current presidential term in order to meet with success,” President Thein Sein continued. The political parties pointed out that a by-law has still not been enacted nine months after the adoption of the law to protect the rights and promote the interest of farmers.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

President Thein Sein in his monthly stated that he is laying a firm foundation for the country and that challenges still remain. This indeed is a valid point since the country has been isolated for half a century and those reforms cannot be accomplished overnight. In this regard the visit by Chinese President Li Yuanchao as well as the delegation of the Elders Group to Myanmar once again reflects the recognition and support by the international community of the democratic transition process prevailing in Myanmar. The visit by Chinese Vice Premier Li Yuanchao is further evident that Sino-Myanmar relations will always remain an integral part of the long-standing “Phauk-phaw” friendship. And it is worth noting that the ties between the two countries are mutual and complimentary and the visit can only further consolidate their relationship for the future. On the domestic front, the meeting between the Commander-in-Chief and the KNU is indeed crucial for the national reconciliation process but more importantly that dialogue and engagement is on-going. It would indeed be beneficial if similar meetings could be conducted with all other ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) leading to building of trust between all concerned. 2014 has seen Myanmar take strides but key significant challenges remain unresolved and that the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and holding of free and fair elections will clearly be the main factors defining Myanmar beyond 2015.

¹⁴ Political parties demand resolution of land disputes before next election – http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8265:political-parties-demand-resolution-of-land-disputes-before-next-election&catid=32:politics&Itemid=354 (Eleven News Media) 2 December 2014