

POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 31

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT MAKES GOODWILL VISIT TO SOUTH KOREA

At the invitation of South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, President U Thein Sein made a 3-day official visit to Korea from 8-10 October. The Burmese President held a summit meeting with the South Korean President on 9 October in Seoul and discussed further expanding of cooperation in trade and investment, resources and energy, and infrastructure and construction, as well as development assistance, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, regional affairs and cooperation on global issues. They then witnessed the signing of MOUs on development cooperation as well as an agreement to promote SMEs. President Thein Sein also spoke at the Myanmar Investment Forum at the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTPA), where he also met Korean businessmen and invited them to invest in the three special economic zones and power generation projects to be implemented in Burma. South Korea is Burma's fourth largest investor.

The President's trip follows President Lee's landmark visit to Burma in May - the first of a South Korean president in over three decades. Relations between the two countries were strained when North Korean agents bombed the Martyr's mausoleum in Yangon in 1983 which killed 17 South Koreans, including cabinet ministers.¹

US AND BURMA HOLD 1ST BILATERAL HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE

The United States and Burma held their first bilateral human rights dialogue from 16-17 October in Yangon, which included talks on the effectiveness of labour law, the role of the private sector in protecting labour rights and promotion of economic performance. It was attended by US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michal Posner and Union Ministers at the President Office U Soe Thein and U Aung Min, Union Minister for Immigration and Population U Khin Yi, and Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister U Zin Yaw.² The sessions also discussed the protection civilians in conflict areas and the provision of humanitarian assistance to those regions, criminal judicial system, the role of court and judicial staff in the rule of law, crime and punishment, matters related to prisoners, laws enacted by Hluttaw, the role of civil society and future programmes. In his concluding remarks, the Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister said that that the issues raised were just an initial but a good step forward in their common efforts for promotion and protection of human rights in Burma. He also expressed his belief that the two countries would be able to continue their cooperation on the basic goodwill and mutual understanding for the benefit of the people and the bilateral cooperation in this area would contribute to the closer cooperation in the regional and international forums.³

¹ President U Thein Sein on goodwill visit to Republic of Korea – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-08.pdf> (NLM) 8 October 2012 (p. 1) / President U Thein Sein arrives in Seoul, ROK – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-09.pdf> (NLM) 9 October 2012 (p. 1) / Myanmar, ROK sign MoU on development cooperation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2012 (p. 1) / Judicial reform to be made in real time for ensuring Rule of Law, basis for sustainability of favourable economic environment – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 October 2012 (p. 16 & 8) / President vows to strengthen ties with ROK through cooperation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 October 2012 (p. 16) / Myanmar-Korea relations and promoting bilateral relations open new chapter – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-13.pdf> (NLM) 13 October 2012 (p. 1 & 8) / Myanmar president to visit S. Korea – <http://elevenmyanmar.com/national/874-myanmar-president-to-visit-s-korea> (Eleven Myanmar Journal) 6 October 2012

² Those also in attendance included personnel from human rights-related ministries and Office of the Attorney General of the Union, advisors to the President, as well as officials from Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Labour and Myanma Economic Corporation. The American officials Included high-ranking officials from US Department of State, US Ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell, Military Attaché Col William Dickey and personnel of State dept's office of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour .

³ Myanmar-US Human Rights Dialogue, a step forward in Myanmar-US ties – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 October 2012 (p. 2) /

US DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BURNS MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT

United States Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns arrived in Naypyitaw on 18 October and met Foreign Affairs Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and Defence Minister Lt-Gen Wai Lwin and discussed matters relating to promoting and further strengthening of bilateral relations as well as military affairs. Secretary Burns also met Lower House Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and had a cordial discussion on Burma's on-going political reform process as well as future tasks for economic reform, foreign investments, progress of drafting laws and parliamentary affairs.⁴

According to a press statement from the US Embassy, Deputy Secretary Burns also held excellent, productive discussions with President Thein Sein, Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic minority parliamentarians. Both sides discussed their shared interests and growing partnership in advancing the political and economic reforms that have already begun. The Deputy Secretary's visit is a reflection of the significant changes that have taken place since President Thein Sein took office and Secretary Clinton made her historic visit one year ago. The United States supports the reforms undertaken since President Thein Sein took office, as part of its "action-for-action" policy.⁵

BURMESE FM VISITS CANADA

At the invitation of the Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird, Burmese Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin made an official visit to Canada from 2 -4 October, where held bilateral talks with his Canadian counterpart on 3 October and discussed the democratic reforms taken by the Burmese government, promotion of human rights as well as opening of the Canadian Embassy in Burma. Other issues included Canadian assistance in education, health, Human Resources Development (HRD), and granting of Official Development Aid (ODA) and investment and economic cooperation between the two countries. The FM's visit is the first by a Burmese Foreign Minister to Canada in over 40 years. Similarly, in March 2012 Minister Baird made a landmark visit to Burma, after years of diplomatic and economic isolation and non-engagement.⁶

SWEDISH PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION MEETS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Lower House Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann received the Second Deputy Speaker of Swedish Parliament Ulf Holm in Naypyitaw on 12 October. Their discussion focussed on promoting and strengthening of bilateral ties and cooperation between the countries and parliaments. Speaker Holm met Union Attorney-General Dr. Tun Shin and exchanged views on the rule of law, anti-corruption and drug eradication measures being undertaken the Burmese government.⁷

BURMA UPPER HOUSE SPEAKER PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO AUSTRALIA

At the invitation of the Speakers of the Senate and House of Representatives of Australia, a Burmese parliamentary delegation led by *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (Union Parliament) and *Amyotha Hluttaw* (Upper House) Speaker U Khin Aung Myint visited Australia from 6 to 11 October, where they met government officials and senators including Governor of New South Wales H.E. Professor Marie Bashir ACCVO, Chairman of Australia- Burma Parliamentary Group Janelle Saffin, Senate Speaker Hon John Hogg and House of Representatives Speaker Hon Madame Anna Burke, and Senators

Interview: Concrete things we might work together -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 16 + 9)

⁴ Union Foreign Minister meets US Deputy Secretary of State –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 2) /

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann receives US Deputy Secretary of State –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 2) /

Union Defence Minister meets US Deputy Secretary of State –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 2)

⁵ Press Statement On The Visit Of Deputy Secretary Of State William J. Burns To Naypyidaw, Burma -

<http://photos.state.gov/libraries/burma/895/pdf/10-18-2012SecretaryBurnsPressStatementEng.pdf> (U.S. Embassy Rangoon) 18 October 2012

⁶ Union Foreign Minister pays visit to Canada –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-06.pdf> (NLM) 6 October 2012 (p. 2)

⁷ Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Swedish parliamentary delegation –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-13.pdf> (NLM) 13 October 2012 (p. 6) /

Rule of law, anti-corruption and drug fight discussed –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-13.pdf> (NLM) 13 October 2012 (p. 2)

Stephen Parry and Alan Eggleston. Speaker Khin Aung Myint explained the on-going political reforms taking place in Burma and stressed the need to further strengthening and promoting bilateral cooperation and study visits for Burmese parliamentarians to Australia.⁸

UNION-LEVEL PEACE MAKING GROUP & SHAN STATE PROGRESSIVE PARTY (SSPP) MEET

A coordination meeting on implementation of agreements between the Union-level Peace-Making Group and Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) Peace Group was held on 11 October. The Vice-Chairmen of the Union level Peace Making Work Committee U Aung Min and U Thein Zaw announced that the government was taking the necessary measures to ensure that every citizen enjoyed their rights and is providing assistance to those who fled the country to return and resettle in the country to resume their normal lives. They added that the government is setting up various committees and working groups to oversee the rehabilitation tasks and stressed the need for the locals to cooperate with the authorities to ensure the success of these tasks. SSPP General-Secretary U Khun Hsaing made a vow never to secede from the Union and pledged to join hand in hand with the government to achieve eternal peace without backsliding and that genuine Union spirit would be the basis for eternal peace. The meeting also discussed the resettlement of over 3,500 people including family members of Shan State Progressive Party/ Shan State Army in Mong Kaung sub-Township and Mongshu Township as well as promoting the standard of living and development activities in the region.⁹

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 5th regular session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw was held for the 1st day at Pyithu Hluttaw Complex in Naypyitaw and attended by Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann and 388 MPs.

During the session, 15 newly appointed Defense Services personnel Hluttaw representatives took affirmation, 7 questions were raised and answered. The Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker's goodwill visits to Australia and Singapore and the parliamentary delegations' visits to Indonesia, China, US, Germany and India were also put on record.

The key questions raised during the session were:

- U Shi Thee of Leshi Constituency (USDP) asked “if there is a plan to accelerate eradication programme of poppy growing in Naga (Lahe and Nanyun) townships”
- U Tin Maung of Chanmyathazi Constituency (USDP) asked if agricultural loans can be increased for coffee growers, internationally recognized coffee association can be formed in the country and if the State can help coffee producers to fetch the existing market price in the global coffee market.¹⁰

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 5th regular session of the first Amyotha Hluttaw held its 1st day at Amyotha Hluttaw Hall of Hluttaw Building and was attended by Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker U Khin Aung Myint (USDP) and 214 Amyotha Hluttaw representatives. 3 questions were raised and answered and 2 proposals submitted and the Speaker briefed the session on Burma becoming a member of the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) as well as his official visit to Australia.

The key proposal raised during the session was:

- Chairman of Public Complaint and Appeal Committee U Aung Nyein of Magway Region Constituency No (2) (USDP) submitted a proposal urging the Union government to take necessary measures in accord with laws, rules and regulations in taking actions against service

⁸ Job creation and technological transfer through investing in oil and gas sector, SMEs and other sectors beneficial to Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 October 2012 (p. 16, 8 & 9)

⁹ Coord meeting on implementation of agreements between Union level Peace Making Group and Shan State Progressive Party held – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-12.pdf> (NLM) 12 October 2012 (p. 2)

¹⁰ No one is above the law, punitive action must be taken against those who break the law: Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 1 & 7)

personnel as direct dismissal without taking any enquires in accord with laws, rules and regulations made service personnel who have no right to make any complaints unfair. The session decided that the matter would be discussed at a later date.¹¹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN RE-ELECTED AS HEAD OF USDP

President Thein Sein was re-elected as chairman of the ruling state party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), but he named a fellow reformer Lower House Parliament speaker Shwe Mann to take over the day-to-day running of the party at the USDP's annual conference in Naypyitaw on 16 October. However, Shwe Mann together with former party General-Secretary Htay Oo, and Chairman of a parliamentary committee on sports, culture, and public relations development Aye Myint were re-elected as the party's three vice chairmen. The Chairman of the Conference Committee Aung Thaung said before the meeting that the conference was important as it would lay down guidance for the party for the 2015 elections. In addition to electing party leaders, the USDP also reorganized its 44-member Central Executive Committee from among some 300 members of a larger panel.¹²

SHAN CONFERENCE PLANNED FOR NOVEMBER

Burma's most populous ethnic minority group, the Shan, will hold a conference in November to discuss solutions for peace in the eastern Burmese state. The event will be attended by Shan military figures, representatives of civic groups and community leaders from across the region, according to Shan sources. The workshop will collate all the represented opinions and will, hopefully, help to produce an agreed common strategy to settle peacefully the ongoing conflicts in the region. Hkun Htun Oo, a prominent Shan leader and chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) is said to be spear-heading the event which is said to include representatives of the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N), the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and other armed groups. He also added that President Thein Sein has publicly asked help from Hkun Htun Oo and other prominent Shan leaders to cooperate with his government in finding peaceful solutions to end years of conflict and that the upcoming conference has received the blessing of the President.¹³

GOVERNMENT OFFERS KIO NEW VENUE FOR PEACE TALKS

The Burmese government has proposed a new venue for peace talks with the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), its second offer in a month. The KIO rejected the government negotiating team's last proposal to hold peace talks in Naypyitaw, saying that it would be inappropriate given that fighting between the sides was ongoing so close to the Kachin headquarters at Laiza. Sources who attended previous talks said a letter of invitation was sent on 10 October inviting the KIO leaders to reconvene peace negotiations at a venue in either Ruili or Muse, both of which are Sino-Burmese border towns. Hla Maung Shwe, one of the brokers for the government's Peace Committee said "This is the proposition for the fourth round of talks. Neither side could previously agree on a suitable venue for various reasons, despite the fact they have already met three times." No exact dates or times were proposed, he added. Naypyitaw's chief negotiator Aung Min last met with Kachin representatives in Mai Ja Yan on 20 June and following that meeting, both sides agreed on the need to further conduct negotiations aimed at resolving tensions between troops at the front lines. Hostilities broke out between government troops and the KIO in June 2011, ending a 17-year ceasefire. According to the KIO, 105 acts of engagement have occurred between the two armies during the month of September.¹⁴

¹¹ Myanmar is now member of ASEP: Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/NLM2012-10-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 October 2012 (p. 16 & 7)

¹² Thein Sein re-elected to head USDP – <http://mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/8239-thein-sein-re-elected-to-head-usdp.html> (Mizzima) 17 October 2012 / Power-Sharing in Ruling Party - <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/burma/usdp-10162012183537.html> (RFA) 16 October 2012

¹³ Shan Conference Planned for November – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/16492> (Irrawaddy) 15 October 2012

¹⁴ Govt Offers KIO New Venue for Peace Talks – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/16369> (Irrawaddy) 12 October 2012

ALLIANCE CALLS FOR 'UNITED STATES' OF BURMA

An alliance of 10 political parties, including five ethnic parties, plans to raise the issue of federalism in Parliament, including a proposal for all 14 states or regions in Burma to be awarded equal rights and administration. The alliance said it will submit a draft outlining its proposal and will submit it to President Thein Sein as well as raising the issue for debate in both houses of parliament. The political parties include: the All Mon Regions Democracy Party, the National Democratic Front, the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party, the Shan Nationalities Development Party, the Chin National Party, the Democracy and Peace Party, the Democratic Party (Myanmar), the Phalon Sawaw Democratic Party, the Union Democracy Party, and the Peace and Unity Party. According to the chairman of the Democratic Party (Myanmar) Thu Wai the 10 parties formed a unified proposal at a meeting in Rangoon on 10 October. He added "We want 14 states or regions with administrative power equally divided among them in accordance with a federal system," he said. "We envisage a federal system similar to the United States". A spokesperson for the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party Saw Than Myint said that he is encouraged to see ethnic Burman parties supporting the idea of a genuine federal union and that those who refused to accept of federalism are remnants of the former military dictatorship under Gen Ne Win, which frequently stated in its propaganda that federalism was akin to separatism. Saw Than Myint said that despite that Burma's official name is based on a Union under the constitution of 2008, sovereignty is essentially controlled directly by a central government. "We have decided to put our efforts into forming a genuine federal system in our country by 2015 or 2020," he said. Various ethnic leaders also expressed a desire to amend the 2008 Constitution in order to build a federal union. Several ethnic leaders within the alliance said they planned to meet with President Thein Sein to talk about their proposal, following a meeting with him in July 2012.¹⁵

RAKHINE POLITICAL PARTY: "CHOOSE THE RIGHT PATH TO PEACE"

According to Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) chairman Aye Tha Aung the unsuccessful peace process between Burma's ethnic armed forces and state army is because of political problems that have not been dealt with properly. He urged the government to choose the right way for the peace process as fighting continues in spite of peace negotiations. "During the past 60 years, many negotiations [were] made for peace, but [were] in vain. The fights are still going on. Why? We should consider why it was not successful. What I want to tell is that political problems during those years were not dealt with [properly]," he said during the party's recent 24th anniversary held in Yangon on 12 October.

In 1947 the Panglong Agreement was signed, which created the Union of Burma where the majority of Burmans and ethnic minorities chose to gain independence from the British rule as a single state. Under the agreement, states are to be united as a union, every state is to be autonomous, and ethnic minorities have the right to secede if they were not satisfied with the government. "There is no more demand for separation by ethnic armed forces or ethnic parties these days. So we, as the states, are just asking for autonomy," Aye Tha Aung said. He added that political parties are now able to speak freely and organize themselves. The ALD, which operated in the Rakhine State, was abolished by the former ruling junta's State Law and Order Restoration Council, and they went into exile and continued their operations.¹⁶

ANALYSIS

The state visit to South Korea by President Thein Sein followed by visits to Australia and Canada by Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and Upper House Speaker Khin Aung Myint can be seen as signs of recognition as Burma strives to regain its position within the international community after years of isolation and non-engagement. The visits to Burma by US Deputy Secretary of State Burns and US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Posner to attend the

¹⁵ Alliance Calls for 'United States' of Burma – <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/16275> (Irrawaddy) 11 October 2012

¹⁶ Choose the right path to peace, political party says - <http://elevenmyanmar.com/politics/983-choose-the-right-path-to-peace-political-party-says> (Eleven Myanmar Journal) 17 October 2012

US-Burma Human Rights Dialogue will indeed be useful in enhancing and strengthening ties between the two countries.

While international shuttle diplomacy may have served its purpose in gaining recognition and restoring ties with the international community, the Burmese leaders have thus far failed to reproduce the same track record in ending the ethnic conflicts which have plagued the country since its independence. President Thein Sein has formed and entrusted peace negotiators both at the Union and States/Regions levels to engage and conduct peace talks, but his teams have not been entirely successful. With fighting continuing in some parts of the Kachin and Shan State and the KNU undergoing an internal leadership crisis, one begins to wonder as to how the national reconciliation will unfold. However, the recent calls to convene a Shan conference by Hkun Htun Oo and the raising of federalism as an issue within parliament by 10 political parties, including 5 ethnic parties, should be seen as positive steps.