

## POLITICAL MONITOR NO. 6

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **EU ANNOUNCES € 150 MILLION AID PACKAGE - EU DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONER PIEBALGS & GERMAN MINISTER of ECONOMIC COOP and DEV NIEBEL MAKE OFFICIAL VISIT**

The most senior EU official to visit Burma to-date, European Union Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs, made an official visit to Burma from 12-14 February and announced that the EU is making available an additional €150 million for 2012 – 2013 in order to respond to the significant political progress. The funding will initially be devoted to health, education, agriculture and to help displaced people in ethnic areas, with further areas to be explored in line with developments.<sup>1</sup>

President Thein Sein received the delegation led by Commissioner Piebalgs as well as a delegation led by German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Dirk Niebel in Nay Pyi Daw on 13 February and exchanged views and discussed assistance for development process of Burma.<sup>2</sup>

Commissioner Piebalgs said that the European Union should respond rapidly to changes under way in Burma driven by the President – a "key reformer" committed to democracy and boosting the country's economy. He said that the President gave clear confirmation that reforms would continue in Burma and that the EU is keen to ease sanctions, but needs more than just assurances of reforms in order to convince all 27 member states to lift the embargoes. A further easing of EU sanctions would allow Burma tariff-free access to European markets under its "everything but arms" initiative, which could create jobs and be a major boost to the economy. According to Piebalgs, "If the process is moving in the right direction, you should not lose momentum when you can make the most positive influence to the country. If you don't respond, you lose opportunities that you would like to take to support democracy, human rights and prosperity." He added that he expected European businesses would not race to get into Burma because of its long-standing stigma and reputation for political risks and once sanctions were removed, it was up to the government and member states to encourage investors and win their confidence.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Unofficial*

Minister Niebel, the first German cabinet member to visit Burma recently, traveled with a German business and economic delegation and visited several projects run by aid and development NGOs Malteser International and Welthungerhilfe. Both he and Commissioner Piebalgs also met with Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> IP/12/115: Commissioner Piebalgs to visit Burma/Myanmar to pledge new support for democratic and economic reform - <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/12/115&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (European Commission – Press Release) 9 February 2012 / For more information on the funding package, please see MEMO/12/89: EU development cooperation with Burma/Myanmar - <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/12/89&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (European Commission) 9 February 2012

<sup>2</sup> President U Thein Sein receives FRG Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, EU Commissioner for Development - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-14.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2012 (p. 1)  
Those present included Border Affairs and for Myanmar Industrial Development Minister Lt-Gen U Thein Htay, Foreign Affairs Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, Minister at the President Office U Soe Maung, Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Tin Naing Thein, as well as the German Ambassador Christian Ludwig Weber Lortsch.

<sup>3</sup> EU should respond rapidly to Myanmar reforms: EU Commissioner (excerpts from original Reuters article) - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 /  
EU should respond rapidly to Myanmar reforms: top EU official - <http://news.yahoo.com/eu-respond-rapidly-myanmar-reforms-top-eu-official-184853757.html> (Reuters) 13 February 2012

<sup>4</sup> German minister begins landmark Myanmar tour - <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15738245,00.html?maca=en-rss-en-all-1573-rdf> (Deutsche Welle) 12 February 2012

## **PRESIDENT RECEIVES ASEAN SECRETARY-GENERAL SURIN PITSUWAN**

ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan was received by President U Thein Sein as part of his five-day visit from 19-23 February. The President and the ASEAN Secretary-General discussed matters relating to political development in the country and work programs for future cooperation in the region. With Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, Surin discussed the progress of ASEAN Community Building, the ASEAN Secretariat's contribution towards Burma taking the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014 as well as ASEAN's call for the lifting of unilateral sanctions on Burma. He also met Minister for Information and Culture U Kyaw San and discussed the development of rural areas and promoting cooperation in culture and media sectors between Burma and ASEAN, the implementation of rural areas development tasks with 8 poverty alleviation measures by forming a central committee led by the President, preparations to hold the SEA Games 2013 successfully by forming a committee as well as measures for greater transparency in the April by-elections. The undertakings of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) and the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Cultural and Arts (AMCA) by Ministry of Information and Ministry of Culture under ASCC-ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community are to be addressed when Burma takes ASEAN Chairmanship.<sup>5</sup>

## **SPECIAL ADVISER TO UN SECRETARY GENERAL NAMBIAR MAKES OFFICIAL VISIT**

Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General for Myanmar Vijay Nambiar visited Burma from 12 to 17 February, where he met President U Thein Sein, Speaker of the Lower House Thura U Shwe Mann, Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, Minister for Immigration and Population U Khin Yi and other cabinet ministers, as well as the Chairman of the Union Election Commission.<sup>6</sup>

### *Unofficial*

In his government meetings, he highlighted three priorities including 1) the holding of free and fair by-elections on 1 April 2012, 2) the attainment of peace and establishing national reconciliation as key to country's overall stability and development as well as 3) the need for the government to deliver on the socio-economic needs of the people. Nambiar also welcomed the Government's recognition of the value of partnership with the United Nations to help Burma meet the challenges and opportunities before it and that the UN was ready to work with all stakeholders in fulfilling these tasks. Nambiar also visited Mon State and Kayin State where he met Chief Minister of State and local ethnic representatives. On 13 February Nambiar met Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, receives ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Surin Pitsuwan and party -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2012 (p. 1) /

Union FM receives ASEAN Secretary-General -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2012 (p. 10) /

Union I&C Minister receives ASEAN Secretary-General -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2012 (p. 2)

<sup>6</sup> President U Thein Sein receives Special Adviser to UNSG and Under-Secretary-General and party -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 (p. 1) /

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Special Adviser to UNSG -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 (p. 16) /

UNSG Special Adviser calls on Union Foreign Affairs Minister -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 (p. 2) /

Union I&P Minister, Special Adviser to UNSG hold talks -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 2) /

Chairman of Union Election Commission receives Special Adviser to UNSG and Under-Secretary-General and party -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 February 2012 (p. 8)

<sup>7</sup> Press release at the conclusion of the visit to Myanmar of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Myanmar, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, from 12 to 17 February 2012 -

<http://unic.un.org/imucms/yangon/80/344/latest-news.aspx> (UNIC Yangon) 17 February 2012 /

## **PRESIDENT RECEIVES ASEAN GROUP DELEGATION FROM GERMAN PARLIAMENT**

President Thein Sein received a goodwill delegation led by Thomas Gamke, the Chair of the ASEAN Parliamentary Group of the German Parliament, in Nay Pyi Taw on 16 February where they had a cordial discussion on the promotion of cooperation between the two countries as well as cooperation between Germany and ASEAN. Those present included Foreign Affairs Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, Minister for Information and for Culture U Kyaw Hsan, Minister for Industry U Soe Thein, Minister at the President Office U Soe Maung, Minister for Labour and for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Aung Kyi and departmental heads, as well as the German Ambassador to Myanmar Christian-Ludwig Weber Lortsch.<sup>8</sup>

## **LUXEMBOURG DEPUTY PM/FOREIGN MINISTER ASSELBORN VISITS BURMA**

Jean Asselborn, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of Luxembourg, made an official visit to Burma from 14-15 February where he met President Thein Sein, the Speaker of the Lower House Thura U Shwe Mann and Foreign Affairs Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, and cordially discussed and exchanged views on friendly ties and cooperation between the two countries.<sup>9</sup>

*Unofficial*

Asselborn also met NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi on 14 February and discussed the election process regarding the upcoming by-elections on 1 April, as well as issues relating to the release of political prisoners and the country's present economic situation.<sup>10</sup>

## **LOWER HOUSE INT'L RELATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIR RECEIVES BELGIUM DELEGATION**

Pyithu Hluttaw International Relations Committee Chairman Hla Myint Oo received Permanent Secretary Dirk Achten for Foreign Affairs, External Trade and European Affairs of Belgium at the Hluttaw Building in Nay Pyi Taw on 13 February. During the meeting the two sides discussed further relations between the parliaments of the two countries, legislative matters, human resources development and investment matters. Those present included Committee Secretary U Ko Ko Tun and members U Mya Thein and U Sai Kyauk.<sup>11</sup>

## **PHILIPPINE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SECRETARY VISITS BURMA**

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert F. del Rosario paid an official visit to Nay Pyi Taw from 8 to 9 February, where he met with President U Thein Sein and held discussions with Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin.<sup>12</sup>

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NLD Chairperson Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meets UN Secretary General's Special Adviser -

<http://www.nldburma.org/international-affairs/un/484-nld-chairperson-daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-meets-un-secretary-generals-special-adviser-.html> (NLD) 17 February 2012

<sup>8</sup> President U Thein Sein receives Chair of the ASEAN Parliamentary Group of the Parliament of FRG and party - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-17.pdf> (NLM) 17 February 2012 (p. 16)

<sup>9</sup> President U Thein Sein receives Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 1) /

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives Dy Prime Minister of Luxembourg -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 2) /

Union FM holds talks with Deputy PM of Luxembourg -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 9)

<sup>10</sup> Visite officielle de Jean Asselborn en République de l'Union du Myanmar les 14 et 15 février 2012 -

<http://www.mae.lu/en/Site-MAE/Actualites/Visite-officielle-de-Jean-Asselborn-en-Republique-de-l-Union-du-Myanmar-les-14-et-15-fevrier-2012> (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 15 February 2012

<sup>11</sup> Pyithu Hluttaw International Relations Committee Chairman receives Belgium Permanent Secretary - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 February 2012 (p. 8)

<sup>12</sup> Philippine Secretary of Department of Foreign Affairs and party -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-10.pdf> (NLM) 10 February 2012 (p. 1)

*Unofficial*

The President expressed his appreciation for the Philippine government's support and encouragement to the various reforms that had been taken by the Burmese Government and also invited the Philippine business community to invest in various sectors in Burma's economy.<sup>13</sup>

Secretary del Rosario also met Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon on 9 February. They held a brief exchange of views on political and socio-economic reforms in the country, rule of law and the by-elections scheduled for 1 April. He expressed his sincere wishes to her especially since the democracy icon will run for a seat in the coming by-elections.<sup>14</sup>

## HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

### Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 3<sup>rd</sup> regular session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw continued for the 4<sup>th</sup> day attended by Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann and 362 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives, 8 questions were asked and answered; 2 proposals and 2 bills were submitted.

The key issues were:

- how the Union Government would address **the unemployment rate in urban areas and villages**
- discussions and approval on replacing members of the **Public Accounts Committee**, recruitment to **Legal Affairs and Special Cases Analysis Commission**, making supplements to responsibility, power of the committee/commission, and privileges and rights of the commission
- Daw Tin Nwe Oo of Dagon Myothit (North) Constituency (USDP) proposed to promulgate the Statute Law to **transform universities into autonomous government agencies.**
- Thura U Aung Ko of Kanpetlet Constituency (USDP) proposed **to open a national university.**
- Union Labour Minister U Aung Kyi (USDP) submitted the **Labour Dispute Settlement Bill** and Bill Committee member U Thaug (USDP) read out the analysis report of the committee on the bill.<sup>15</sup>

During the 5<sup>th</sup> day session, attended by Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann and 346 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives, 11 questions were asked and answered, one proposal was discussed and one proposal submitted. The key issues were:

- U Aung Thein Lin of South Okkalapa Constituency (USDP) asked a question on **INGOs and registered local NGOs in Burma.** Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Ko Ko answered that although there are 53 INGOs in Burma, only six of them are registered at the Home Affairs Ministry. Of the remaining 47, 13 are in the process of under scrutiny for their registration. Those 53 INGOs are engaged in 67 kinds of works such as education, health,

<sup>13</sup> A New Roadmap in Phl-Myanmar Relations -

<http://www.dfa.gov.ph/main/index.php/newsroom/dfa-releases/4738-a-new-roadmap-in-phl-myanmar-relations>

(Philippine DFA) 10 February 2012 /

Secretary Del Rosario Meets Filipino Community in Myanmar -

<http://www.dfa.gov.ph/main/index.php/newsroom/dfa-releases/4748-secretary-del-rosario-meets-filipino-community-in-myanmar> (Philippine DFA) 13 February 2012

<sup>14</sup> Secretary Del Rosario Meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi -

<http://www.dfa.gov.ph/main/index.php/newsroom/dfa-releases/4747-secretary-del-rosario-meets-aung-san-suu-kyi>

(Philippine DFA) 13 February 2012

<sup>15</sup> Third regular session of Pyithu Hluttaw meeting continues for Fourth day -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 6 & 7).

nourishment, drinking water supply, sanitation, agriculture, livestock breeding, food sufficiency, disaster management and social and environmental conservation. As to local NGOs, there are 278 registered.

- U Tha Win of Yankin Constituency (USDP) asked a question on **seeking permits to hold annual religious ceremonies** as it is currently a long procedure and whether such ceremonies can be organized just with the permit of the respective township administrative body.
- U Sai Hla Kyaw of Linkhe Constituency (SNDP) asked if there is an exact **plan to transmit ethnic nationalities programmes in ethnic languages on all TV channels**. Deputy Minister for Information U Soe Win replied Myanma Radio and Television (branch) of the Ministry of Information is transmitting ethnic nationalities programme in different languages.
- U Soe Win of Sangyoung Constituency (NDF) submitted the proposal that **gems and jewellery should be sold products with added value** and not as raw materials. Minister U Thein Htaik urged MP U Soe Win to withdraw his proposal because it differs from the present conditions and seems to weaken gems market in Nay Pyi Taw.<sup>16</sup>

During the 6<sup>th</sup> day session, 7 questions were raised and answered, 1 new proposal was submitted, 1 bill was approved and 1 important proposal was submitted and additional members were assigned to a commission. The key issues were:

- U Thein Nyunt of Thingangyun Constituency (NDF) submitted the proposal that the Hluttaw urge the government **to establish an independent and reliable National Anti-Corruption Commission** led by the people for taking actions against corruption in order to emerge Clean Government and Good Governance.
- Discussions were held on the **Workers Dispute Settlement Bill** and the Hluttaw approved it.
- The assignment of members to the **Legal Affairs and Special Affairs Assessment Commission** was made.<sup>17</sup> The appointment of members for separate sub-commissions on Political Affairs and Security Affairs, Economic Affairs, Social and Cultural Affairs, Science, Technology, Research, Information and Communication Technology and Legal Affairs covered by the Commission will also be formed.<sup>18</sup>

During the 7<sup>th</sup> day session, 7 questions were replied to and 1 bill was approved.

- The key issue was that the Bill Committee and two Hluttaw representatives put forward proposals to **amend the Foreign Currency Bill** submitted on 15 February.<sup>19</sup>

### **Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> regular session of the first Amyotha Hluttaw continued for the 4<sup>th</sup> day, attended by Speaker U Khin Aung Myint (USDP) and 201 Amyotha Hluttaw representatives. 10 questions were raised and

<sup>16</sup> Pyithu Hluttaw session continues for fifth day / Eleven questions asked and answered, one proposal discussed, one proposal submitted -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 February 2012 (p. 1, 7, 8 & 9).

<sup>17</sup> Representatives Dr Nay Lin, Dr Win Myint, U Tin Maung Oo, U Win Than, U Win Oo, Dr Maung Maung Wint, U Kyi Tha, U Aye Mauk, U Thein Lwin, U Kyi Min, U Min Swe, U Mann Maung Maung Nyan, Daw Nan Wah Nu, U Sai Thiha Kyaw, U Ba Shein, Dr Soe Yin, Col Htay Naing, Col Myint Ko Ko and Col Tint Hsan and those from outside -U Myint Swe and U Khin Maung Soe, U Nay Win, U Win Myint, U Tin Htwe, U Taik San, U Toe Naing Mann, U Win Thein, U Aye Lwin and U Thein Oo as were selected as members of Legal Affairs and Special Affairs Assessment Commission.

<sup>18</sup> Pyithu Hluttaw session continues for sixth day / Seven questions answered, one new proposal submitted, one bill approved, one important proposal submitted, additional members assigned to a commission -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2012 (p.16 & 8)

<sup>19</sup> Seventh day session of Pyithu Hluttaw continues / Seven questions asked, replied, one bill approved -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-22.pdf> (NLM) 22 February 2012 (p. 1 & 8)

answered, 3 proposals were made, 2 bills submitted, 1 bill discussed and 1 bill passed. The key issues were:

- The Hluttaw approved **to supplement to level monthly emolument of the financial and legal commission.**
- U Tin Maung Win of Mandalay Region Constituency No. 3 (USDP) asked if there is **a plan to combat bribery and malpractice by authorized personnel.**
- U Khin Maung Yi of Ayeyawady Region Constituency No (6) (USDP) , U Soe Myint of Bago Region Constituency No (6) (USDP) and Dr. Myat Nyana Soe of Yangon Region Constituency No (4) (NDF) discussed the amendments to **Environment Conservation Bill** made by the Pyithu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw decided to ask the bill committee to reconsider the discussions.<sup>20</sup>

During the 5<sup>th</sup> day session: 10 questions were raised and answered, 1 bill was discussed, and 4 proposals were discussed and approved. The key issues were:

- U Nyan Lin of Ayeyawady Region Constituency (3) (USDP) raised the question on the latest developments and progress regarding **negotiations with ethnic armed groups to achieve peace.**
- Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee U Hmat Gyi read the report of the committee on the **Social Security Bill.** Representatives Dr Mya Oo of Bago Region Constituency No. 9 (USDP) and Dr Win Myint Aung of Sagaing Region Constituency No. 4 (USDP) participated in the discussions on the bill.<sup>21</sup>

During the 6<sup>th</sup> day session: 8 questions were asked and answered, 1 proposal submitted, 3 proposals tabled and 1 proposal discussed.

- Dr Aye Maung of Rakhine State Constituency No. 1 (RNDP) asked about **multi-purpose transport on the Kalatan River;**
- Dr. Myint Kyi of Yangon Region Constituency No. 8 (USDP) submitted **a proposal Urging the Union Government to boost the paddy production productivity and to make the farmers earn more income** , which was discussed by the Hluttaw.
- U Saw Aung Kyaw Naing (a) Sharbuphaw of Kayin State Constituency No.1 (PSDP) discussed Chapter (4), Section 10 (a), Sub-section 4, Chapter (6), Section 16 (b) and (c), Chapter (7), Section 21 and Section (10) Sub-section 33 of the **Vacant Land, Fallow Land and Virgin Land Management Bill**, which has approved by Amyotha Hluttaw. The Hluttaw decided to discuss with the Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee.<sup>22</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> day session: 6 questions were raised and answered, 2 bills were discussed and 1 proposal discussed and recorded. The key issue was:

- In the discussions on the **Foreign Investment Bill**, MPs stated the need for the country to have not only a proper investment law but also a good legal system. As the existing Burmese foreign investment laws do not conform with the present day conditions, the Foreign Investment Law bill under discussion includes 19 chapters and 47 sections that have

<sup>20</sup> Third regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for fourth day -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2012 (p. 7, 8 & 9)

<sup>21</sup> Third regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for fifth day. Cash donation put on record, ten questions replied, one bill discussed, four proposals approved -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-18.pdf> (NLM) 18 February 2012 (p. 16, 9 & 10)

<sup>22</sup> Third regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continues for sixth day / Eight queries replied by respective Union Ministers, one proposal submitted, three proposals tabled, one proposal discussed to be proved -

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2012 (p. 16 & 9)



been compiled with a view to ensuring the development of foreign investment. Many countries show interest in making investment in Burma. In doing so, there might be those who want to invest in a legal way as well as opportunists. Suggestions were made on including monitoring measures to be added to the existing law in order to be attract foreign investors.<sup>23</sup>

### Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Hluttaw) Sessions

The 3rd regular session of First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw took place at Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Hall in Hluttaw Building on 11 February and was attended by Speaker U Khin Aung Myint (USDP), Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann (USDP) and 546 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives. During the session, 1 new proposal was submitted, and the discussion of bills continued. The key issue was:

- U Thurein Zaw of Kawkareik Constituency (USDP) submitted the proposal on the findings of the Union Auditor-General over the **river water pumping stations, reservoirs, dams and diversion weirs built by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.**<sup>24</sup>

During the 10<sup>th</sup> day session, the key issues were:

- The Speaker read out President's comments on **Ward or Village-Tract Administration Bill** sent by the President according to State Constitution Section 106, Subsection (a).
- U Sai Thiha Kyaw of Mongyal Constituency (SNDP) submitted a proposal on **adopting a national transport network policy.**<sup>25</sup>

During the 11<sup>th</sup> day session, the key issue was:

- Discussion were held on **river water pumping stations, reservoirs, dams and diversion weirs proposal**, noting that priority should be given to the benefits from the construction of dams and reservoirs and that in addition to building new dams, the existing dams and reservoirs are to be maintained to meet set standards, that the completion of implemented dam projects should be emphasized, but that in drawing and implementing policies, the Hluttaw should consider public participation and suggestions from the private sector.<sup>26</sup>

During the 12<sup>th</sup> day session, the key issues were:

- The Hluttaw approved the proposal submitted by U Thurein Zaw (USDP) on **the construction of pumping projects, dams and diversion weirs by the Ministry of Construction**, with 399 votes in favour, 63 abstentions, and 53 against.
- Minister for Finance U Hla Tun, Minister for Myanmar Industrial Development Lt-Gen Thein Htay and Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Tin Naing Thein discussed and gave clarifications on **increasing pay salaries, allowances for government staff, industrial development policies, and national development projects.**<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Third regular session of first Amyotha Hluttaw continued for seventh day / Donations for library put on record, six questions answered, two bills discussed, one proposal discussed and recorded - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-22.pdf> (NLM) 22 February 2012 (p. 1, 9 & 10)

<sup>24</sup> Ninth day session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-11.pdf> (NLM) 11 February 2012 (p. 1)

<sup>25</sup> Tenth Day session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues discussions on bills, clarification of a bill, submitting a new proposal carried out - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-14.pdf> (NLM) 14 February 2012 (p. 8)

<sup>26</sup> 11th day session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw continues - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 (p. 16)

<sup>27</sup> Members of Union level organizations take part in Pyidaungsu Hluttaw 12th day session - <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs13/NLM2012-02-17.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2012 (p. 16 & 2)

## UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

### **KNU/KNLA PEACE COUNCIL MEETS DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI**

A delegation from the Kayin National Union/Kayin National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA) met NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss possibilities for future cooperation. General Saw Htay Maung, the leader of the 14-member delegation, explained that the Karen National Union breakaway group wanted to work hand in hand with both the government and the NLD for the benefit of the people. The meeting on 10 February focused mainly on development and ethnic affairs. Afterwards, the General said that the group had been seeking an opportunity to talk with Suu Kyi for a long time. "Whether Bamar or Kayin or other ethnic groups or even Thai, we are the same and never discriminate. We need to continue [working together]." The delegation also invited her to meet the residents of their region, which she accepted. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that while it was the first time she had met the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, both sides shared many similar views and discussions were friendly. The meeting came just days after discussions with government officials in Nay Pyi Taw with whom the Peace Council reached a preliminary peace agreement.<sup>28</sup>

### **INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC) DELEGATION VISITS BURMA**

A delegation from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in its first ever visit to Burma from 12-16 February 2012, met with trade unions who had applied for registration, recently released Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB) members, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and government officials. The delegation met with the representatives from the Myanmar Industrial Trade Unions (MITU), the Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar (AFFM), the Journalist Press and Publication Workers' Union (JPPWU) and the Textile and Garment and Leather Workers Union (Bago) and the Daik-U General and Transport Workers Union and had separate meetings with FTUB leader Myo Aung Thant and U Myat Hla of Bago region NLD. The main focus of discussions were on the legal interpretation on the recently passed Labor Organization Law and past and present functions and interpretations of the labor law in Burma. They also visited the Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone, attended a briefing on the Labor Organization Law given by the Deputy Minister of Labour U Myint Thein, and met senior officials from the Ministry of Labour to discuss the Labor Organization Law, the Prison Code and the Labor Organization Rules.<sup>29</sup>

### **ANALYSIS**

The numerous recent visits by senior officials from the international community once again reflect the positive international response towards the on-going changes taking place inside Burma. In the past, the political stalemate within Burma had been viewed as a struggle between the military and the opposition led by the NLD. While that was true to a certain extent, the involvement and the participation of the ethnic nationalities within the political process is and has been the key issue. Therefore, the initiatives taken by the new government in Nay Pyi Taw in holding peace talks with the various ethnic armed groups should remain a top priority.

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<sup>28</sup> KNU/KNLA Peace Council meets with NLD leader - <http://www.mmmtimes.com/2012/news/615/news61518.html> (Myanmar Times) February 20 - 26, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) delegation visits Burma - <http://www.phophtaw.org/english/index.php/news/regionall-news/412-international-trade-union-confederation-ituc-delegation-visits-burma.html> (Phophtaw) 18 February 2012

The delegation was headed by Stephen Benedict, Director of the Human and Trade Union Rights (HTUR) department and also included Jeffrey Vogt, Legal Advisor of the ITUC and the HTUR, and Patuan Samosir Senior Officer, Organizing and Projects ITUC Regional Organization for Asia-Pacific (ITUC-AP).



The fact that there have been discussions in the parliamentary assemblies (Hluttaws) on corruption and the work of NGOs is also a positive sign that issues once seen as taboo and sensitive can now be discussed openly. It is important to note that the MPs now participating in these discussions in Nay Pyi Taw are doing it so for the very first time. Under such circumstances, for those who are accustomed to seeing parliamentary debates in Brussels or Westminster may see the parliamentary discussions taking place in Burma as undemocratic or even without significance - it is true that there is much room for improvement. However, building capacity and training government officials and civil society would be a good start as there has been a general lack of knowledge. There is a window of opportunity to engage. It would be timely and appropriate for Nay Pyi Taw and all stakeholders, including the international community, to seize this opportunity and promote genuine change in Burma.