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MEDIA MONITORING REPORT # 168

ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

[The First Karen National School Re-open in Rangoon's Taigyi Township](#)

Karen News, 13 June 2017

The National Karen School has re-opened under a new name, the Karen Affairs School by the Karen Literature and Cultural Committee. The school is located in Yetakalay village in Rangoon Region.



With aim of reviving Karen national schools, the Taigyi Township Karen Literature and Cultural Committee reopened the school with support from local villagers.

Naw Hser Hser Htoo, the director of the Taigyi Karen Literature and Culture Committee told *Karen News* that she wants the school to be a model for other areas.

“There were Karen national schools in Taigyi or Oakan. This is the first revived Karen national schools in this area. And we want similar schools to be opened in other places as Karen people can manage to reopen the schools by themselves.”

At the school reopening ceremony held on June 10, 120 people, including Naw Panthinzar Myo, the Minister of Karen ethnic affairs and chairperson of Rangoon Region Karen Literature and Culture Committee, Chairman of Yangon northern district Karen Literature and Culture committee members, Karen teachers and locals attended.

Naw Panthinzar Myo, the Minister of the Karen ethnic affairs and chairperson of Yangon region Karen Literature and Culture Committee acknowledged the effort by the Township committee.

“Taigyi Karen Literature and Culture Committee has been working hard. A donor donated this school for study. It is important to get the support of teachers, community and Karen Literature and Culture committee in order to run this in a sustainable way.”

Naw Arr Naw, the donor of the land that the school is built on said that she wanted Karen to learn about their literacy and culture.

“I donated this plot of land for the school so that a new generation of Karen youth can learn Karen literature, Karen affairs and other modern fields of study.”

Initially, the school plans to start with primary students to be taught Karen language in the morning before school hours.

Before 1962, there were many Karen national schools in Konemane, Oatpone, Gytgone and other villages in Taigyi Township, Rangoon Region, but they were all nationalized and this is the first school to be re-opened as a Karen Affair School.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2017/06/the-first-karen-national-school-re-open-in-rangoons-taigyi-township.html/>

An economics degree opens doors of opportunities

Myanmar Times | Friday, 19 May 2017

A Growing and developing economy needs, among others, highly skilled economists who are more than mere bureaucrats.

Myanmar is no exception. As a developing nation, a vibrant and thriving economy is needed to harness the nation's economic resources as well as people who can manage it in a dynamic and changing environment.

Economics, as subject, has acquired new importance in the development and future progress of Myanmar.

As such, the role of economists becomes increasingly important to a nation that depends on foreign investments and the construction of infrastructure as the nation propels itself forward.

Economics, as subject, came under the broad category of the social sciences over the last half century.

However, things have changed. Noting the critical role economics plays in nation building, the Yangon Institute of Economics (YIE) offers graduate degrees and diplomas, mostly in commerce, statistics and economics.

But to earn a place at this prestigious and competitive institute, potential students have to achieve excellent scores in their matriculation exams. In addition, as the number of applicants increases yearly, it becomes tougher to gain entry as the minimum requirements are raised, say lecturers and teachers at YIE.

According to several YIE students, economics is taught as a professional subject and getting a qualification from the institute paves the way for job opportunities.





Ma Thiri Tun, a fourth year YIE student said, “Theoretically, the LCCI [London Chamber of Commerce and Industry] courses are similar to the accounting subjects that we have to study at YIE. We can work as accountants in the private sector after we graduate.”

As Myanmar opens up its doors and economy, the number of banking concerns and foreign investment companies coming in have increased and job opportunities for graduates from YIE is going up exponentially.

Potential students who want to earn an economics degree have two routes: full time on-campus study and distance learning to receive a government-accredited qualification.

Two routes, one goal

Those who attend the institute as full-time day students will have to take eight major subjects and will be conferred degrees according to the subjects majored.

Currently, the YIE confers Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Economics (Economics), Bachelor of Economics (Statistics), Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Public Administration degrees after taking a four-year course. Honours in these degrees will be granted after an additional year of study. These degrees will be conferred only to the students who attend YIE full-time.

Students who choose distance learning will be conferred a Bachelor of Arts and Business Management degrees only.

Salaries and the positions of work will depend on the degree earned. Students who wish to pursue a course at YIE should look carefully into the courses offered before embarking on their studies. If they achieve commendable grades in subjects taught during their undergraduate degree they will be allowed to pursue a Master’s degree.

PhD students will be required to submit a written thesis after three years of post-graduate research.

A basic degree in economics opens doors to many job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. After finishing a doctoral degree, a State-level advisory position may even be in the offing.

An economics degree differs in subject matter and details. If students choose to major in accounting, job opportunities in the accounts section of major business and finance companies are open to them. If they choose banking as a subject, bank manager positions are open. Those who study management usually work as lecturers at economic institutes.

U Kyaw Ko Ko, a 2015 B Econ (Hons) graduate said, “As my degree is a professional qualification, it is a little different from an arts or science degree and opens the door to more job opportunities. It has a very high education standard and is practical orientated and meets the needs of the economy.”

Institutes specialising in economics are not available in all states and regions in Myanmar. There are only four institutes of economics in the country: Monywa Institute of Economics in Sagaing Region, Meiktila Institute of

Economics in Mandalay Region, Yangon Institute of Economics (Ywar Thar Gyi) and Yangon Institute of Economics (Main) in Yangon Region.

Students from Kayin, Mon and Rakhine states, Tanintharyi, Yangon and Ayeyarwady regions have to go to the two Yangon Institutes of Economics, while students from northern Shan, Kachin and Chin states and Sagaing Region are allowed to attend Monywa and Meiktila Institutes of Economics.

Competitive entry

Only the students from southern and eastern Shan and Kayah states, Magwe and Mandalay regions can apply to the Meiktila Institute of Economics. However, if students want to attend schools outside their regions, they must send their applications directly to the institutes.

The institutes will selectively accept those who meet the entry requirements which is up to 10 percent of the total enrollments. The applicants are required to fill in the names of the institutes they want to attend in order of priority.

The entry requirements for these institutes differ. According to the official statements, prospective students who pass their matriculation exams with at least 50 marks in each subject and have a total score of a minimum 350 will gain entry. However, the minimum entry scores may be adjusted and differ from one place to another, depending on the available seats at the universities.

Daw Thin Thin Htwe, assistant lecturer at YIE said, “We have to increase the minimum entry scores because there are more and more university applicants. The students are getting better every year. Different universities require different entry scores as universities accept a fixed number of students and the entry scores are adjusted based on the number of applicants.”

YIE accepts only 1200 students each year, although the number of undergraduate applications continues to rise. The minimum entry marks for the YIE was set at a total score of 420 this year, she added.

Economics institutes all over Myanmar produce more than 4000 graduates from full-time courses attendance and over 1000 from distance learning, according to lecturers at the institute.

Previously, the economic institutes awarded degrees after three years of study. However, since 2002, students need to study four years to earn a degree. Visiting lecturers from YIE go to various universities to cater to students who undertake the distance learning method. The lecturers from Yangon Economics Institutes will visit different regions to teach their subjects.

Critical role

Entrepreneurs we spoke to agreed that for the business and finance sector to prosper in Myanmar, economics graduates will be critical for growth and development. To boost the country’s economic growth, economists are necessary and the role of such graduates cannot be more emphasised.

“We do not dare to hire people without economics degrees to work in finance because even a minor accounting error can have dire consequences. We can only employ qualified experts with economics degrees,” said entrepreneur Ko Zay Thiha.

There are many job opportunities available for the economics graduate in Myanmar. Economics graduates can work in government banks, private banks, the immigration and national registration department, department of development affairs and trading departments, according to business experts.

Also, economics graduates can apply for jobs in international companies and find work overseas.

“Myanmar’s economy is changing at a rapid rate. There are many opportunities for economics graduates. They do not even need to apply for them. They should work in foreign companies to gain experience. They have good salaries too,” said economist Daw Ye Ye Myint.

Economics students can potentially contribute to the country. These graduates play an important role in international business and collaborations.

The prospective economics graduate, after completing the Bachelor’s degree, will be a valuable asset not only to family businesses but also to the country’s economy.

Translation by Win Thaw Tar and Swe Zin Moe

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/special-features/educentre/26054-an-economics-degree-opens-doors-of-opportunities.html>

Colleges to be upgraded, award degrees

Myanmar Times, 5 June 2017

Education colleges will be upgraded to degree-level institutions this academic year, according to the Higher Education Department.

“We will run it as a pilot project at four colleges,” U Aung Aung Min, deputy director-general of the department, said late last month. The upgrade would happen in December.

The Ministry of Education has been trying to do this for the past few years.

According to the ministry, there are 23 education colleges nationwide that offer a 2-year diploma course, and after two years of training, students from education colleges are appointed as primary school teachers at basic education schools. Over 10,000 teachers are operating every year from education colleges.

“We need experienced and mature teachers to be primary school teachers. To become a primary school teacher, there must be two years of training,” U Aung Aung Min told the media on the side-lines of the National Education Strategy Plan presentation in Yangon on May 26.

Now curriculums have been redesigned and upgraded for degree courses based on the primary education curriculum and teacher competency standards.

The ministry has been trying to upgrade colleges to provide education degrees to improve the quality of teachers, according to comments of the Education Minister U Myo Thein Gyi, published in the state-owned media in March.

He said a master plan was being drawn up for the upgrade. Two more education colleges are under construction and will open in the coming academic year.

Haka Education College, the 24th in Myanmar, will open this December and Katha Education College, the 25th will open in the 2018-19 academic year.

Link: <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/26255-colleges-to-be-upgraded-award-degrees.html>

1,000 new YBS buses to hit YGN roads

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 3 June 2017

Yangon Bus Service (YBS) is expanding its ride service with the addition of 1,000 new buses within the next two weeks, according to an announcement by the Yangon Region Transport Authority.

(YRTA) in Friday's editions of The Mirror Daily. The Yangon region government purchased 500 new buses from China Yutong company and 500 buses from Ankai car company.

"A total of 1,000 new buses will arrive in three consignments," said Dr. Maung Aung, a secretary of YRTA. The bus yard will be located at People's Square, he said.

The Yangon region government purchased the buses at a cost of US\$ 56,000 per bus.

The Chinese government guaranteed the buses would be manufactured at a high industrial standard, according to YRTA.

Link: <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/1000-new-ybs-buses-to-hit-ygn-roads/>



Mon State to expand 69 schools

Mon News Agency, 1 June 2017

The Mon State Department of Education will expand 69 basic education government schools for the 2017-2018 school year, according to U Myo Tit Aung, the department's director. Most of the schools are located in difficult to access areas.



"We've mostly expanded schools in Ye, Kyaikmaraw and Bilin townships, where communication and movement are more difficult," U Myo Tit Aung said.

The newly expanded schools will begin to teach extra years of education. For example, expanded primary schools will now teach primary and middle school students. The 69 expanded schools include 11 high schools, 22 middle school, 12 post-primary schools and 7 primary school. The department also plans to expand 5 sub-high school, 10 sub-middle schools and 2 sub-primary schools, where students

are taught by government teachers but must go to other locations for exams.

The schools that will be expanded are spread throughout Mon State's townships, with 15 in Ye, 14 in Kyaikmaraw, 11 in Bilin, 9 in Thaton, 7 in Paung, 6 in Kyaikhto, 4 in Thanbyuzayat, and 2 in Mawlamyine.

U Myo Tit Aung of the Education Department added that they will also fill many vacant teaching positions in schools throughout the system.

“We have plans to fill the vacant teaching posts during this academic year, including in the schools that we’ve expanded this year.”

For the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 103 high schools, 50 middle schools and 887 primary schools in the government system. Between government, private and monastic schools throughout the state there are 400,000 students.

Link: <https://monnews.org/2017/05/31/mon-state-to-expand-69-schools/>

Myanmar’s first graders receive first new curriculum in 20 years

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 13 June 2017

MORE than one million first grade schoolchildren will receive new textbooks starting this month based on a curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) since 2014.

The joint MOE-JICA project, called the project for Curriculum Reform at Primary Level of Basic Education (CREATE), is the first major reform of Myanmar’s first grade curriculum in about 20 years.

The textbooks are colorful with many pictures and designed to be accessible and attractive to young children. The textbooks will be delivered with detailed teacher’s guides for each subject.

The CREATE project was developed by 40 Japanese and overseas curriculum experts and more than 60 Myanmar academics.



The textbooks were reviewed and approved by the National Curriculum Committee formed by the National Education Policy Commission.

The new primary education curriculum includes 10 subjects: Myanmar, English, mathematics, science, social studies, morality and civics, life skills, physical education, performing arts and visual arts. The national curriculum will be taught alongside a local curriculum, which will be developed by each State and Regional Government.

JICA prepared for the introduction of the curriculum by organizing a series of MOE trainings for township, district, state and region education officials. Union ministry officials also attended trainings.

Following these managerial sessions, the educational reformers hosted in-service trainings for teachers across the nation from 23 January to 26 May.

These trainings were offered at the Union level, the state and region level, the township level and school and family level training. The in-service trainings reached teachers from all categories of grade one schools including monastic and private schools.

The reform group also organized curriculum trainings at Myanmar's education colleges so that it is the basis of teacher training programs in academia.

Link: <http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/myanmars-first-graders-receive-first-new-curriculum-in-20-years/>

Mon States eyes more affordable housing units

Mon News Agency, 7 June 2017

The Mon State government is seeking approval to build 4,600 affordable housing units across two townships, according to local officials.



U Thin Zaw Moe, deputy director of the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development under the Mon State's Ministry of Construction, said the project has already been submitted to the Union government and the Economic Affairs Committee.

"The apartments will be built in Min Village in Kyaikmaraw Township, and Phaung Sein Village in Thanbyuzayat township," he said.

The budget for the projects will come from the state's coffers, as well as joint ventures with the companies who win the tender, he added.

"Forty-four acres of land will be used for the 2,432 apartments in Min Village in Kyaikmaraw," he said. "There will be three sizes [of apartments]: 324 square feet, 400 square feet, and 650 square feet."

He estimated that the Min Village housing will provide accommodation for 10,000 people, with the apartments to be sold at an average of K5 million each.

Many of the government's so-called affordable housing projects have come under fire for high sticker prices. The housing is often touted as a solution to urban slums and shantytowns, but is rarely within the means of the targeted families who scrape by on a minimum wage of K3, 600.

U Thin Zaw Moe countered that the Human Settlement and Housing Development Bank could help families to afford the new units when they become available, and added that an instalment plan will make the apartments more attainable.

"The down payment is K3 million. The remainder of the cost can be paid through eight year instalments," he said.

Link: <https://monnews.org/2017/06/07/mon-states-eyes-more-affordable-housing-units/>

Govt commits to 22 per cent of power generation from coal, natural gas

Eleven Myanmar, 13 June 2017

The Ministry of Electricity and Energy said it will produce 22 per cent of its electricity from natural gas and coal in the coming five years.

Under the National Electricity Master Plan, hydropower will account for 54 per cent of the power generation; natural gas and coal, for 22 per cent; and renewable energy, for two per cent, between 2020 and 2021.

Now, the state-owned sector produces 51 per cent of power, and the private sector, the remaining 49 per cent. Before 2008, the government monopolised the power production sector.



Dr Tun Naing, deputy minister for Electricity and Energy, said at recent talks on the development of the electricity and energy sector at the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry: “In 2008 alone, the ownership ratio between the government and the private in the power production sector was 96 per cent to 6.24 per cent. In 2009-2010, the ownership ratio was 76.45 per cent and 23.55 per cent. In 2015-2016, the ownership ratio was 51.6 per cent and 48.4 per cent. So the ownership ratio is now said to be 50-50.”

In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, hydropower plants produced 59 per cent of power, and gas-fired power plants, 41 per cent, according to the Ministry of Electricity and Energy.

The nationwide power consumption increased from 6,467 units in 2010-2011 FY to from 13,551 units in 2015-2016 FY, a more-than-200-per-cent average increase in five years, the deputy ministry said.

During five years, the electricity sector saw a 16-per-cent average increase in annual power consumption rate. Many villages have no easy access to electricity and the people are still experiencing power blackouts.

Link: <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/9997>

People 90 and older to start receiving pensions

Myanmar Times, 14 June 2017

Pensions for people 90 years old and above will be transferred through local authorities starting Friday.

All people at least 90 years old as well as monks and nuns will receive payments. To apply for the pension one needs to submit a national registration card and household member list. The pension is the government's first monthly payment program for the elderly.

Most of the elderly in nursing homes have no national registration card or household member list, said Daw Khin Ma Ma, vice president of See Sar Yeik home for helpless and chronically sick old people.

“Most of the elderly here were abandoned. They don’t have documents when they reach our centre. There are 121 residents here, most of whom have no evidence and don’t know how old they are. We guess about ten of them are older than 90, but only two have evidence of their age and can get the pension from the government,” she said.

The Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Ministry has designated four steps for the elderly who have no proof of their age. It recommends getting certification from ward and township administrators, a township immigration department, a township social welfare department and the ministry’s Social Welfare Department in Nay Pyi Taw.

“This process will help get them monthly support,” U Aung Kyaw Moe, director of the Social Welfare Department, said.

The ministry will transfer social pensions to township administrators on Thursday and the administrators will hand them out beginning on Friday. The Social Welfare Department list shows that 31,835 elderly people have applied for pensions. They will receive K10,000 each per month.

The government has allocated K420 million for pensions for the elderly in the 2017-2018 budget. The pension program actually started in April, but the June payment will be the first payment and will cover April, May and June.

“Those people who are going to reach the eligible age can register before the next budget handout, which is in September,” U Aung Kyaw Moe said.

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/26375-people-90-and-older-to-start-receiving-pensions.html>

Cable car to Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda to start in October

Myanmar Times, 14 June 2017

Visitors to Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda in Mon State will soon be able to ride Myanmar’s first cable car from Yathetaung to the pagoda, U Myo Wai, a member of the Special Advisory Committee of Sky Asia Company told *The Myanmar Times*.



Sky Asia is implementing the cable car project, which is almost 75 percent complete.

“We intend to complete the project by the end of July and we will conduct a test run for about three months to ensure passenger safety. We aim to open the cable car in October at the beginning of the tourist season,” U Myo Wai said.

Technicians from France and South Korea are implementing the project and have ordered

43 cable cars from France, each of which can hold about eight people, he said.

“Initially we intended to run from Kinpun base camp up to the pagoda platform, but the Kyaikhtiyo bus terminal is already there, so we decided to only run from Yathetaung to Kyaikhtiyo pagoda platform,” he said.

They plan to charge K3000 each for Myanmar and US\$5 (K6816) for foreigners for the ride, which will take about 10 minutes, he said. “We will adjust the prices to be less than bus fares.”

In terms of the Myanmar Investment Commission, there has been an 80 percent investment by Korea and 20pc by Myanmar. They will rent 13.5 acres with BOT system for 50 years from the Mon State resources, environment and forestry ministry.

“It would be the first cable car in Myanmar, which will make it easy for pilgrims to get to the pagoda,” according Dr. Min Kyi Win, minister of resources, environment and forestry in Mon State.

“They invested US\$20 million (K27.3 billion) to build a cable car system that they planned to open last year, but it was delayed for various reasons. But this time, it will certainly open during the tourist season,” U Myo Wai said.

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/lifestyle/travel/26367-cable-car-to-kyaikhtiyo-pagoda-to-start-in-october.html>

Kayin State enjoys tourism influx after ceasefire

Burma News International, 14 June 2017

Peace has paved the way for tourism in Kayin (Karen) State, tourism officials said this week.

U Win Kyaw, deputy director of Kayin State’s Department of Hotels and Tourism, said tourist arrivals have increased annually. He attributes the windfall to the signing of the preliminary ceasefire in 2012, after which the number of visitors climbed from 10,000 to 150,000 last year.

“Peace is the reason for the increase. Roads and bridges have been upgraded. They are now open 24 hours a day. Progress in the peace process has led to regional stability as well as better roads and communication,” he told KIC News.



Kayin State welcomed over 40,000 tourists in 2013, followed by 50,000 in 2014. Last year, the number of visitors reached a record 150,000.

Between January and April this year, the state’s Department of Hotels and Tourism has already logged more than 25,000 tourists.

The majority of tourists stick to the temples and caves around Hpa-an township, due to continued travel restrictions within the state. Fewer tourists visit the state during the rainy season.

According to the tourism department, French travellers top the list of foreign visitors, followed by German and Dutch tourists.

Fu Saw Kal, a trustee from Kaw Ka Thawng Cave in Hpa-an, told KIC News that the cave received an average of 30 tourists per day last year. This year, the daily number is closer to 50.

Kayin officials have eyed the state's tourism potential as a revenue booster, and a way to reenergize areas that have had little economic opportunity. But with much of the state still contaminated with landmines and lacking reliable roads or basic infrastructure, industry experts say the sector still has a long way to go before it can accommodate large-scale tourism. And while the ceasefires have restored a semblance of peace for the most part in Kayin State, sporadic outbreaks of fighting have occurred, and stability is far from guaranteed.

The Karen National Union signed a preliminary bilateral ceasefire in 2012, and was one of the eight signatories of the nationwide ceasefire agreement in 2015.

Link: <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/3155-kayin-state-enjoys-tourism-influx-after-ceasefire.html>

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

The first spanking new and classy and modern cinema is to be built in Loikaw, Kayah State.

Myanmar Times , 01 June 2017

The Union Minister for Information Dr Pe Myint told the Amyotha Hluttaw meeting yesterday (May 31) that "There is a plan to build a high-class cinema in Loikaw, Kayah State. The Ministry of Information (MOI) will inspect the location of the old Thiri cinema and negotiate with the Kayah State government on acquiring the land."

He was answering a query from No 6 Kayah Constituency Representative Daw Lwi Zar, who had asked if there were plans to build a cinema in the land left vacant by the former Thiri cinema.

"Construction of the cinema and land management matters can be handled by the MOI only after the land has been transferred to the Kayah State government in accordance with procedures," he said.

Dr Pe Myint said "The reply from Kayah State government stated that after getting the rights to manage the land, construction of a supermarket complex with a cinema will be developed with the State budget in the next fiscal year or the project will be handed over to a private firm."

The process of transferring relevant documents to the MOI is under way and management matters is being handled by the respective Regional and State governments for a long-term lease.

The management and running of cinemas have been completely transferred to the private sector, he added.

"Loikaw is the major city in Kayah State. It should have a modern cinema that has full features befitting a big city. I raised the question in the Hluttaw wanting to know if this was possible," said Daw Lwi Zar.

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/26209-coming-soon-new-cinema-in-loikaw.html>

NLD CEC meeting focuses on return of lands

Myanmar Times, 5 June 2017

The Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the National League for Democracy (NLD) met at Sibin guest house in Nay Pyi Taw on Sunday to discuss the return of acquired lands, secretary U Win Htein said.

“We discussed the issues relating to the return of the acquired lands in regions and states. We want to review the lands that were confiscated after 1988 as well as those acquired by the government and return the vacant land,” he told the media after the meeting.

Land issues of private companies and individuals were also discussed, he added.

The process of returning the land will be conducted at the earliest possible time, despite not having a definite time frame.

Regarding the exclusion of Hluttaw MPs at the township level in the acquired land review committees, he said, “We are now negotiating again. Only when MPs are included in the committees, can it be approved. MPs are not included in the committees of two or three regions.”

Complaint letters against the MPs were received but as they had no evidence, no action will be taken, U Win Htein said at the meeting.

“Those complaint letters are baseless,” he said. Committee member U Nyan Win also said that no action would be taken for lack of evidence.

A press conference was held relating to the personal secretary of Yangon Chief Minister U Phyo Min Thein.

Touching on it, U Win Htein stated that it would be handled according to law. “It will go according to law. We have no reason to interfere. Based on the complaint, the relevant authorities will handle it.”

The NLD CEC meeting lasted for one-and-a-half hours.

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/26251-nld-cec-meeting-focuses-on-return-of-lands.html>

Swiss help in developing vocational education

Myanmar Times, 19 May 2017

Switzerland will help in developing vocational skills for as long as Myanmar requires it, according to Swiss Ambassador to the country, Paul R Seger.

“Our experiences in other countries show that we have helped in the development of such skills for up to ten years or for as long as it takes to achieve the desired goals. Again, we are here to help Myanmar for as long as the government requires our help. It is not for a mere four years. It is much longer,” Ambassador Seger told the media on February 24.

Five areas



said “We will start planning the programs for the next four years. We will consider increasing the number of trainees to about 8000 to 10,000 youths. We plan to expand our programs,” he said.

Program expansion

To promote the training programs, Switzerland is planning to go on road shows in Patheingyi township, Ayeyarwady Region, Mawlamyine township, Mon State, and Mandalay city, and to instill public awareness among the local community in order to emphasise the importance of vocational skills.

Ambassador Seger said, “Over the last few years, we have trained hundreds and hundreds of young people in Myanmar. Because of these programs, many get good jobs, good salaries and have a bright professional future. I can tell you right here, we are ready to continue with this commitment over the next few years.”

Switzerland began assisting Myanmar since 2012 and they have been providing vocational training since 2013 by providing courses for Myanmar youths wanting to upgrade their skills.

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/special-features/educentre/26049-swiss-help-in-developing-vocational-education.html>

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

State Counselor: Peace Conference Agreements ‘A Significant Step’ for Burma

The Irrawaddy 29 May 2017

NAYPYIDAW – The stakeholders’ negotiations at the Union Peace Conference (UPC) “mark a significant step” toward future democratic federalism, said the State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the closing ceremony of the second 21st Century Panglong in Naypyidaw.

Despite encountering disagreements over the basic federal principles of equality and self-determination—among the government, the political parties, the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed organizations—the members of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) who organized the event are optimistic that the conference achieved its aims “to some extent.”



Over the weekend, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who is also the chairperson of the UPDJC, participated in negotiating the key terms of the federal principles, such as those concerning secession from the Union and equality between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed organizations.

“The agreements that we have been able to sign today mark a significant step on our path toward peace, national reconciliation, and the emergence of a democratic federal Union,” said the State Counselor. “Reaching these agreements has not been easy; we have encountered moments of disappointment as well as inspiration along the way.”

“Yet I am greatly encouraged that despite our many different views and perspectives, we have been able, through frank discussion and negotiation, to reach common positions,” she added, stating that the foundations for democracy and federalism for future generations have been laid through dialogue.

After the negotiations, stakeholder representatives from the government, Parliament, the Burma Army, political parties, and ethnic armed groups who were signatories to the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) agreed to 37 of 41 basic federal principles and signed part 1 of the Union Accord on Monday.

The first part of the accord was signed by Dr. Tin Myo Win, the chairman of the Peace Commission; U Tun Tun Hein, the chairman of Lower House’s bill committee; Lt-General Tin Maung Win; Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, the vice chairman of Karen National Union; and U Thu Wai, the representative of the political parties.

However, key principles regarding equality, self-determination and federalism have not yet been included in the accord, and delegates said further discussion would continue in this regard.

U Yaw Thet, the chairman of the Lahu National Development Party said that the UPC at this point served as a forum to collect perspectives. “It is not yet easy to make any concrete decisions as not every group is participating in the process yet.”

The [debate](#) about the term “non-secession from the Union” was not settled and the Tatmadaw wants a commitment from the ethnic armed organizations that they pledge not to separate from the state.

Daw Saw Mra Yar Zar Lin, a UPDJC secretary and member of the Arakan Liberation Party said they had agreed to the signing of the first part of the Union accord, but that each of the armed groups did not need to sign on its own.

She said, “It cannot be said that ALP is pleased about the outcomes, because we are being suppressed, and we could not fully bring our people’s desires [to the UPC],” referring to not being able to conduct the ethnic-based national level political dialogue in Arakan and Shan states.

“But we contributed to the discussion over general principles, which reflected the people’s desires,” she explained, adding that Monday’s agreement is just a part of the Union accord, which can be further reviewed and revised.

The eight ethnic armed organizations—the NCA signatories—also discussed during the six-day conference how they will move forward in the peace process, despite holding different opinions than the Tatmadaw.

Lt-Col Sai Ngern of the Restoration Council of Shan State said that they “had compromised with understanding, in order to keep the peace process ongoing.”

“We have also begun to learn how we might be able to create unity out of diversity,” Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said, adding that “we can find similarities despite our differences and we can identify common ground through peaceful negotiation.”

She urged the public “to continue actively along the path of peace and to remain focused on the future,” to end the decades-long conflict in the country.

Topics: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Ethnic Issues, Military, Peace Process, Politics

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/state-counselor-peace-conference-agreements-a-significant-step-for-burma.html>

Federal system to take shape by 2019, presidential spokesperson says

Burma News International, 31 May, 2017

Ethnic autonomy and the long-sought federal Union of Myanmar is not so far off, at least according to the presidential spokesperson, who outlined an optimistic timeline at the second Union Peace Conference this past weekend.



U Zaw Htay, a former military officer and deputy director of the President’s Office, told reporters at the peace talks that by 2019, the federal Union will start to take shape.

“The real aim of our government’s peace policy is to install the democratic federal [system] demanded by the ethnic people,” he said. “Further discussions will be held in 2017 by this government. We hope the concept will evolve from a basic principle to more detailed principles by 2018. The federal [system] we are implementing will be shaped in 2019. The federal

[system] will have [state] constitutions and self-determination, which have been continuously demanded by the ethnic people.”

The president’s spokesperson cautioned however that the federal Union could only be achieved if ethnic groups consent to a non-secession clause.

The topic of secession proved contentious at the Nay Pyi Taw discussions, with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing lashing out at ethnic armed organizations in his opening speech, saying some of their demands extend far beyond the right to self-determination and could threaten to undermine the Union.

The six-day 21st-Century Panglong Conference ended on May 29 with a closing ceremony, but with no substantial agreements or progress made on the issue of federalism.

Many ethnic armed groups continue to point to the military drafted 2008 constitution as the major stumbling bloc requiring amendment, but the Tatmadaw has been steadfast in insisting all parties adhere to it.

“If one looks at the points agreed to in the NCA [the nationwide ceasefire agreement], it states that we will establish a Union based on [the principles of] democracy and federalism, which will guarantee equality and the right to self-determination. The state constitution and the Union constitution need to be compatible in order to make this happen,” said U Tun Zaw, secretary of ethnic umbrella organization, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). “Yet no matter how the state or region constitutions are drafted, there’s no way for these constitutions to guarantee federalism with the 2008 constitution still in place.”

The UNFC did not attend to the second round of the 21st-Century Panglong Conference, but some of the member organizations attended as observers.

<https://www.bnionline.net/news/item/3104-federal-system-to-take-shape-by-2019-presidential-spokesperson-says.html>

UWSA Steadfast in Stance on NCA Amendments

The Irrawaddy 29 May 2017

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) remains steadfast in its stance that the current nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) needs to be amended regardless of Burma Army statements to the contrary.

The country’s most powerful ethnic armed group released a paper to the media at the start of the second session of the 21st Century Panglong peace conference on May 24 about its attempts to negotiate with the Burma Army regarding the NCA.



The UWSA sent a draft NCA to the Burma Army and the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) in March, following an ethnic summit hosted in Panghsang, the Wa administrative capital.

Wa sources say the Burma Army never responded to the draft.

Efforts to expand the current number of NCA signatories have faltered and conflict persists in the north, despite previous bilateral ceasefire agreements with some groups in the region.

The Wa did not participate in the initial drafting of the NCA as it had a longstanding ceasefire with the Burma Army and did not see the efficacy of signing the new agreement.

However, China has placed pressure on the group to accept the NCA and change its political stance, and the Wa sees stability in the region as a path to development.

“If there is no stability in northern Shan, development in the Wa region will be hindered. We call for a stop to fighting between ethnic armed groups and the Burma Army,” the statement said.

The Wa was discouraged by the lack of response to their NCA draft and the army’s public discourse on the issue.

Burma Army Vice Senior General Soe Win spoke to media in early May and stated, “Not even one word of the current NCA can be changed.”

The Wa statement said the army’s public statements had shamed them in the media.

“The Wa will not begin fighting easily. We have already expressed our wishes for peace. But if you ignore our wishes, we will have nothing to say about fighting,” the statement said.

It continued that the army should have replied privately, as opposed to airing its disagreement publically, showing its disrespect for ethnic groups.

The Burma Army has also expressed its stance that the country only needs one army, which the Wa opposes based on Burma’s history.

The Wa paper added that this was a longstanding conflict that will be difficult to solve in a short time.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Wa-Papers-900x417.jpg>

The UNFC: From High Hopes to an Uncertain Future

The Irrawaddy 29 May 2017

On its founding in 2011, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) was one of the most formidable blocs of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) Burma had ever seen, with the grand ambition of representing almost all of the country’s EAOs during peace talks with the government.



Resignations and suspensions have eroded the alliance’s original 13-strong membership to seven since 2014, with further plans for the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Wa National Organization (WNO) to leave.

Arguments over which way to approach Burma’s peace making process are rattling the bloc. Five of its members—the New Mon State Party (NMSP); the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP); the WNO; the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU); and the Arakan National Council (ANC)—are in favor of signing the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). But the KIO wants to abandon the NCA.

A trail of criticism followed the Karen National Union (KNU) when it left the bloc in 2014, including accusations of an uneasy proximity to the Burma Army and a lack of solidarity with the UNFC leadership under the KIO.

The KNU argued for a decentralization of power away from the KIO, but the leading member rejected the KNU's proposal, triggering KNU leaders to walk out of the meeting and quit the bloc the next day.

In 2015, the bloc dismissed the Chin National Front (CNF) and the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO) when they signed the NCA.

In the same year, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA)—resigned from the bloc because they said the UNFC could not offer them protection or help them negotiate with the government.

Leader of the UNFC, the KIO, has [shown interest](#) in leaving the bloc to join the China-backed Northern Alliance, which includes powerful EAOs such as the United Wa State Army, the TNLA, and the MNDAA. The departure of the KIO would significantly diminish the military might of the UNFC.

Members of the bloc rejected an invitation to attend the 21st Century Panglong peace conference in Naypyidaw as “special guests,” dismissing the status as that of observers who could not participate in the conference's discussions, in contrast to the Northern Alliance, which attended unexpectedly.

The Burma Army and the government will continue to reap political benefits from the discord with the UNFC, as its members are pressured and pushed aside.

As the NCA signatories negotiate with the government and the Burma Army, and the Northern Alliance attempts to carve an alternative way to peace for itself, the future of the bloc remains uncertain.

Topics: Ethnic Issues, Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), Peace Process, The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), Union Peace Conference, United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/commentary/the-unfc-from-high-hopes-to-an-uncertain-future.html>

[KNU Calls for Withdrawal of Burma Army Troops](#)

The Irrawaddy 31 May 2017

Local Karen National Union (KNU) leaders have called on Burma Army troops to withdraw in order to ensure a safe return for displaced villagers.

Several hundred internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Pla Kho area and Ei Htu Hta camp in Papun District in northern Karen State recently [held a demonstration](#) on the Salween River, calling for the Burma Army to withdraw its units.

The move came as humanitarian support dries up along the Thai-Burma border, pressuring refugees to return to their villages despite the Burma Army presence.



According to a Karen activist group, the number of Burma Army bases in Papun district has increased from 65 to 81 since a ceasefire agreement was reached in 2012, making displaced people feel unsafe amid numerous ongoing allegations of abuse by Burma Army troops.

A statement released by a KNU district committee supported the removal of troops in Papun District so that IDPs could return home without fear.

Papun District, also known as Mutraw District, is the territory of KNU Brigade 5, considered the strongest of the KNU's seven brigades. KNU Brigade 5 leaders say they are cautious regarding the ceasefire and peace process.

A displaced housewife, Naw Hsa Gay from Ei Htu Hat camp, said she dared not go home while Burma Army troops were still stationed there.

"I fled home because of their abuses and I dare not go back. I want Burma Army troops to move out completely from our areas and burn their bases. Only then, will we dare to return," she said.

Villager Saw Rer Ker said: "I want all land mines to be cleared and military bases removed from civilian areas so we can go back and stay peacefully. I hope to see Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's government bring about this change."

Villagers also called for an end to human rights abuses, an end to military offensives in ethnic areas, and the removal of landmines from civilian areas. They also pressed for a code of conduct that is properly monitored.

The KNU's Mutraw District standing committee stated that the Burma Army occupation, expansion, and persecution were the root causes of decades of civilian fear.

"Until, and unless, the government withdraws its troops and army bases, there will be a lack of suitable land to use for livelihood, and no guarantee of a safe return for IDPs," said the KNU statement.

Some IDPs in Pla Koh area and Ei Htu Hta camp in Papun District have been displaced for more than four decades. Ei Htu Hta hosts about 3,000 displaced people from KNU brigades 2 and 5 who fled military offensives in 2006. These IDPs were told that humanitarian assistance would be cut in September and that they should begin preparations for their return.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-calls-for-withdrawal-of-burma-army-troops.html>

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