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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

To Advance Peace Process, Gov't Urged to Build a Union All Groups Want to Join

The Irrawaddy, 28 September 2018

CHIANG MAI, Thailand—to resolve the current standoff over the issue of non-secession, observers of the peace process urged the government at a stakeholders meeting in Yangon on Friday to focus its efforts on building a Union whose conditions would make it unnecessary to extract a pledge of non-separation from ethnic groups.

The Myanmar military currently that ethnic groups pledge never to seek secession from the Union as a prerequisite for moving ahead with the peace process. Ethnic groups have balked at the request, believing it would put them at a disadvantage as the process moves forward.



“[The secession] issue is a stumbling block, because [Myanmar’s military says] that without a pledge not to seek secession, we cannot draft a state constitution. Our suggestion is that instead of asking for this promise, which is merely words on paper, what if we build a Union from which no one wants to separate in the first place?” said U Maung Maung Soe, an analyst who closely follows ethnic and political affairs.

The government invited nearly 40 people to a meeting of stakeholders in Myanmar’s peace process and sought their perspectives at Yangon’s National Reconciliation and Peace Center on Friday.

It was the second such meeting to be held under the National League for Democracy-led government. The first, in July 2017, was attended mainly by descendants of the signatories of the original 1947 Panglong peace agreement, along with a few other experts.

Friday’s discussion was attended by some representatives of Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Karen and Bamar political parties; civil society groups and think-tanks working on the peace process and related policy; former Myanmar Peace Center employees; and writers and journalists. They spent a day discussing the current peace process and sharing insights. All of the participants were close followers of the peace process.

The secretary of the government’s Peace Commission, U Khin Zaw Oo, and State Counselor’s Office director-general U Zaw Htay shared details of the government’s efforts and the challenges it

faces dealing with the country's ethnic armed organizations during peace talks, and offered their views on why the process has been delayed.

"After listening to the government's explanation of its efforts, I expressed my view that we must all think in terms of the whole country's sovereignty, not in terms of individual [groups'] sovereignty, so that we can move forward on the peace building journey and build a federal state," said U Khin Maung Swe, the chairman of the National Democratic Force (NDF) party.

The 29 participants in Friday's discussion shared their opinions, while the government negotiators were able to clarify some of the misunderstanding that exist regarding the peace negotiations, said U Hla Maung Shwe, an adviser to the Commission.

"Every issue related to the peace process was discussed," U Hla Maung Shwe told The Irrawaddy, though he declined to discuss details.

Among the main hurdles to progress in the peace process are non-secession, prohibitions on the holding of ethnic political dialogues in Shan and Rakhine states, and the absence of negotiations between the government and northern-based ethnic armed organizations, including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

U Hla Maung Shwe said he was glad that Yup Zau Khawng, a leader of the Kachin Peace-talk Creation Group (PCG) based in Myitkyina, was able to participate.

The PCG served as a key peace broker during talks between the KIA and the previous government.

"Such discussions are good if we can spare time for [regular] meetings," he said, because they allow the majority of participants to air their concerns, while the government gets a chance to respond.

Such stakeholder discussions were held frequently under the previous administration of former President U Thein Sein.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/advance-peace-process-govt-urged-build-union-groups-want-join.html>

Korean Reconciliation: Three Lessons for Myanmar's Leaders

The Irrawaddy, 24 September 2018

South Korean president Moon Jae-in landed on North Korean soil on Sept. 18 for a historical meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Moon is the third president to visit North Korea following Kim Dae Jung in 2000 and Roh Moo Hyun in 2007.



September's Moon-Kim summit marked the third of its kind and was the fifth inter-Korean summit ever held. Previous meetings between the two current presidents took place earlier this year on April 27 and May 26 at the inter-Korean border.

short space of time since Moon took office in May 2017.

The concerted efforts of the two leaders are praiseworthy, having met three times in such a

The most recent meeting, held in Pyongyang, was devoted to discussing denuclearization and the stability of

the Korean Peninsula through creating a system of perpetual peace. The summit reached an unprecedented agreement for denuclearization: the permanent dismantling of a missile engine test site at Tongchang-ri.

There are three significant lessons Myanmar's leaders should learn from the two Korean leaders.

The first lesson is drawn from their willingness and commitment to denuclearization and peace. Both Moon and Kim appear to have realized that no one is responsible for denuclearization and peace in the Korean Peninsula except themselves, thus they endeavored for these meetings to be held.

The second lesson is drawn from their sending of special envoys from each state to the other in an effort to break the ice. Prior to Moon-Kim summit in Pyongyang, both leaders sent special envoys respectively to establish a rapport and smooth relations for their summit.

"The special envoy delegation's visit turned out really well. The results were much better than I'd expected," said Moon after sending a special delegation to the North in early September.

The third lesson comes from the face-to-face meeting, which took place on North Korean soil. Moon paid a historic visit to his counterpart's land as a sign of his commitment to peace. After three rounds of meetings, Kim also spoke about the possibility of a visit to Seoul in the very near future.

Due to concerted efforts on both sides, the North Korean leader, Kim, appears to have intentions for a complete denuclearization within three years—before Trump's four-year presidency ends in January 2021. As well as denuclearization, the two Korean leaders even agreed to seek the rights to co-host the 2032 Olympics.

Myanmar's civil war—an internal conflict and having more marginal effects than nuclear weapons—should have been tamed earlier and solved more quickly through efforts by leaders from all parties. Instead, Myanmar's peace process has become a prolonged affair and has achieved only deadlock rather than peace.

The recent government's Union Peace Commission (UPC) meeting with members of the Northern Alliance—including the Arakan Army (AA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)—on Sept. 5 in Kunming, China, was a positive step for furthering efforts in ending the ongoing clashes.

Regrettably, a planned meeting on the same day between the UPC and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) was canceled due to weaknesses in preparations for the event. This followed meetings in February and August between a delegation of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) led by Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung and KIO representatives led by Gen. N'Ban La, at which no results were achieved due to the Tatmadaw's coercion and preconditions for further talks.

In order to expedite the peace process in Myanmar, it is essential for leaders from both sides—both the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups—to pursue peace by putting forth a strong commitment to peace, by sending special delegations, by visiting each other's areas and by meeting each other without preconditions.

As they can either be instrumental in advancing the peace process or detrimental in sabotaging the entire peace effort, Myanmar leaders, especially leaders from the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups, should thus learn lessons from the leaders of North and South Korea.

As Kim said during a press conference proceeding the recent Moon-Kim meeting in Pyongyang: "We agreed to make active efforts to turn the Korean peninsula into the land of peace without nuclear weapons or nuclear threats," Myanmar's citizens believe that if both the Tatmadaw generals and ethnic leaders have strong commitments to peace, they can surely turn this war zone to a land of peace without any fighting.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/korean-reconciliation-three-lessons-myanmars-leaders.html>

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

A closer look at the Yangon buildings and construction industry

Myanmar Times, 1 October 2018

The structural integrity of residential and commercial buildings is constantly in focus due to the frequent earthquakes in Yangon and the Yangon City Development Committee is conducting regular inspections of the buildings in order to ensure their strength.

Daw Hnin Ei Win, head of the Buildings Engineering section in YCDC, said the department strictly enforces the regulations specified in the building code and violators are penalised.

She said, for new construction projects, the Buildings Engineering section sees to it that all the necessary permits have been secured and the materials used meet the correct specifications.

Construction permits are approved only when detailed engineering calculations are included, Daw Hnin Ei Win said.



“During the actual construction, we also inspect whether the regulations are being followed. If violations are being committed, the construction permit is revoked,” she said, adding that the section works to ensure no one suffers as a result of substandard construction work or materials.

“To ensure the quality of buildings, engineers certified by Engineering Council are the only ones permitted to supervise the construction,” Daw Hnin Ei Win said.

At present there are about 600 applications for construction permits in the city, according to YCDC’s records.

Daw Hnin Ei Win said the city is regularly updating its construction rules and regulations with technical assistance from the World Bank.

U Zarni Aung, an architect, said that in addition to the maintenance of old buildings, new buildings should be regulated to ensure responsibility and accountability.

“If there are some faults found in a building, the person who constructed the building should be held responsible and accountable. At present this is not the case. If something happens the responsibility is always passed to ‘others’,” said U Zarni Aung.

A senior official of the Myanmar Earthquake Committee, which oversees efforts to ensure preparedness and resilience during earthquakes, said that the country’s building code needs to be updated to incorporate the latest technologies.



Building codes have been updated but some additions are still required, said Myanmar Earthquake Committee's vice chair U Saw Htwe Zaw.

"In our nation, there are types of buildings that are not included in the Building Code, such as those constructed with bamboo and wood. Research must be conducted on how to construct these kinds of buildings so that they can withstand earthquakes and improvements must be made to such existing buildings," he said.

When a new development plan was approved after 1988, there was lack of skilled people in the country and the durability and quality of buildings constructed during that time was weak, U Saw Htwe Zaw said. He urges that buildings built during that period be thoroughly inspected.

He said priority must be given to structures used by many people, such as schools and hospitals.

U Zarni Aung said everybody involved in the construction of buildings, from financiers to the actual contractors, have the responsibility to ensure the quality and safety of their projects. But, he added, it is still the government which has the primary responsibility since it is the one that makes rules and regulations.

"Individual performance cannot make the entire construction sector safe and the quality good. When officials in different levels do not perform well, it affects the overall result. Therefore, all are responsible for it," he said.

U Myo Myint, general secretary of the Myanmar Construction Entrepreneurs Association, points out the shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry.

"Only if the workers are skilful will the products be good," he said.

"Just being able to hold a hammer or use a saw can't produce a good basic worker; they need to know skills related to their work and how to work systematically."

He added that, aside from skilled workers, the provider of the construction materials, including the importers, play an important role as well, noting that they need to supply quality products at reasonable prices.

To improve the country's construction industry, the government should seek the advice of experts in different fields within the construction sector and also foreign experts, said Architect U Zarni Aung.

The country's economy needs a reliable construction industry, which can build good quality apartments, bridges, roads and other infrastructure in order to keep up with the demand for economic growth, said U Zarni Aung.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/closer-look-yangon-buildings-and-construction-industry.html>

Business group vows to help 7000 Yangon workers get ID cards

Myanmar Times, 1 October 2018

The Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry vowed to help some 7100

workers in Yangon Region's 14 industrial zones to get their national registration cards (NRCs), a senior executive of the organisation said.

Daw Khine Khine Nwe, associate general secretary of the federation, said yesterday that her group will secure the cards within two months.

"There are nearly 400,000 workers in 14 townships in the region. Among them, 7100 workers do not have NRCs. We'll get cards for them within two months," said Daw Khine Khine Nwe.

She said they have been trying to get the NRC cards from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population since September 10.

The NRCs will give the workers proof of identity and help employers comply with the law, she said.

"With the full cooperation of employers and employees, it will be successful," Daw Khine Khine Nwe said.

Director General U Thein Shwe Win of the Immigration Department said the cards will be distributed at central locations in Yangon's eastern, western and southern districts.

Ko Naw Aung, vice chair of the Myanmar Industries Craft and Services Trade Union Federation, said that workers used to think that having an NRC made no difference. Recently, those who had the cards found that they had better opportunities, so the (workers) called for more NRCs to be issued, he said.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/business-group-vows-help-7000-yangon-workers-get-id-cards.html>



LAND AND PROPERTY

Most of Seized Lands aren't Paid Compensation under Development Projects, KHRG says

Karen News, 20 September 2018

No compensation has been given to most of the villagers whose lands have been seized for development projects in southeastern Burma, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) said.



The KHRG made this claim during a launching ceremony of its report titled 'Development without us', which was held at the Thai-Burma border on September 18.

"We've clearly stated that most of the public haven't received land compensation. The development projects use a lot of lands but only a few projects have given some compensation," Saw Way Lay, spokesperson of the report, said to Karen News.

Even when land compensation was given, the villagers were forced to accept it in fear due to pressures and threats from local government authorities, the military, and armed organizations, he continued.

The 'Development without us' report is published in Karen, English, and Burmese and contains five chapters and over 100 pages. The report highlights the situation of human rights violations that result from land confiscations by development projects in southeastern Burma from 2015 to 2018.

"Many development projects entered after 2012. We are projecting the voices of ethnic people, who have been neglected and suffer from human rights violations after the entry of [the development projects]," said Naw Htoo Htoo, program director of the KHRG.

These development projects include a large-scale mine, coal-fired power plant, a Chinese city project for Chinese entrepreneurs, an industrial zone, a large-scale agriculture industry, a hydropower project, construction, and a road construction project and lands are being seized for these projects, according to the KHRG's report.

"Whether it is the government, the mother organization (KNU), or civil society organizations (CSOs), everyone must cooperate to resolve the issue of the development projects violating the rights of local residents. Although development projects are important, it's important not to affect the public's livelihood and areas during the implementation [of the projects]," said Naw Alice from the Karen Women Organization, who attended the report launching ceremony.

In the report, the KHRG has called on the KNU and the government to protect the complainants and the CSOs that are acting on behalf of the land confiscation victims, calculate fair compensation for the villagers, and have transparency.

Founded in 1992, the KHRG is an independent organization that engages in report-writing based on documentation of human rights violations, which are faced by local residents, and raising public awareness on issues relating to the protection of human rights. This is the organization's third report on land confiscation.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2018/09/most-of-seized-lands-arent-paid-compensation-under-development-projects-khr-g-says/>

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

New UN panel to prepare indictments over Myanmar atrocities

Frontier Myanmar, 10 September 2018

GENEVA — The UN Human Rights Council voted Thursday to set up a panel to prepare criminal indictments over atrocities committed in Myanmar, amid allegations of genocide against the Rohingya minority.

The top UN rights body voted to "establish an ongoing independent mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011."

The text, a collaboration between the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation,



says the panel will be responsible for preparing "files in order to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings... in national, regional or international courts or tribunals."

Thirty-five of the council's 47 members voted in favour of the resolution while only three — China, the Philippines and Burundi — voted against.

The remainder either abstained or refrained from casting a vote.

The text was presented after a damning report was released to the council earlier this month, outlining in meticulous and searing detail atrocities against the Rohingya, who fled a violent military campaign that started in August last year.

The 444-page report by a UN fact-finding mission concluded there was enough evidence to merit investigation and prosecution of Myanmar's army chief and five other top military commanders for crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya.

Troops, sometimes aided by ethnic Rakhine mobs, committed murder, rape, arson and torture, using unfathomable levels of violence and with a total disregard for human life, investigators concluded.

More than 700,000 of the stateless Muslim minority took refuge in Bangladesh, where they remain — fearful of returning to mainly Buddhist Myanmar despite a repatriation deal between the two countries.

The military has denied nearly all wrongdoing, justifying its crackdown as a legitimate means of rooting out Rohingya militants.

The UN and rights groups meanwhile say the operations were vastly disproportionate and a troop build-up in the area occurred before insurgents attacked police posts in August 2017.

Further pressuring Myanmar, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague independently ruled that it had jurisdiction to open a preliminary investigation, even though the country has not signed the treaty underpinning the court.

Thursday's text took note of the ICC ruling, and requested "the mechanism to cooperate closely with any of its future investigations pertaining to human rights in Myanmar."

The resolution also said the mandate of the UN fact-finding mission should be extended until the new mechanism is operational.

Thursday's decision marks the first time the Human Rights Council has itself opted to create such a mechanism.

A similar panel was created in late 2016 to build cases for the prosecution of war crimes in Syria, but it was set up following a vote in the General Assembly in New York.

Link: <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/new-un-panel-to-prepare-indictments-over-myanmar-atrocities>

Newly Formed Mon Party Sets Sights on 2020 Elections

Network Media Group, 25 September 2018

The Mon Party is aiming to win the majority of parliament seats in Mon State in the general elections scheduled for 2020.



According to the party's leadership, they will do this by building trust with a range of ethnic communities in the state. In the 2010 and 2015 elections, they explained that the focus was on garnering support from their own ethnic group, but that the new party—a merger of three Mon political parties—had a new strategy.

"We will continue to persuade other ethnic people to vote for us in the coming 2020 general elections," said Nai Kyan Yit, a central executive

committee member of the Mon Party. "Unity is essential. Unity is strength. We have successfully merged Mon political parties. We hope we will benefit from this."

The Mon Party was officially introduced to the public on Friday after being formed from the All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMDP), Mon National Party (MNP) and Mon Representative Party.

Party leaders said that the party's constitution, policy, Union Election Commission registration and future plans would be decided in the first central committee meeting.

"It's no problem to have many different political parties under a democratic system. Ethnic people need to build a federal Union. Before building a genuine federal Union, we must be united and we must have unity to work with other ethnic people," Mon local Ko Min Aung Htoo told NMG.

In addition to the Mon Party, the Women's Party (Mon) still remains as a separate ethnic Mon party active in the state.

The AMDP, MNP and Women's Party (Mon) ran in the 2015 general elections. The AMDP won one parliamentary seat in the state parliament and the MNP won three seats—two in the state parliament and one in the Union's Upper House.

Among the Mon public, it was believed that the Mon parties lost potential seats in the last election due to vote splitting.

The AMDP ran in the elections in 2010 and won 16 seats, with representation in the Upper and Lower Houses and the state parliament.

Link: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/newly-formed-mon-party-sets-sights-2020-elections>

NLD to Purge Ineffective Members of Parliament

The Irrawaddy, 27 September 2018

MANDALAY — the vice-chairman of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party said on Thursday that the party is planning to expel members of Parliament who they deem to be inactive and lacking empathy for their people.

U Zaw Myint Maung, who is also chief minister of Mandalay and one of the NLD's most influential members, told reporters after the



parliamentary session in Mandalay that the move aims to strengthen the team of lawmakers who represent the party.

“We are reviewing the activities of every [NLD] parliamentarian looking at how they work in the field and what they have done for their constituencies. If we find members who are inactive, uncompassionate or fail to follow the party’s rules and regulations, they will be expelled from their position and not allowed to participate in the upcoming 2020 election,” said U Zaw Myint Maung.

In looking forward and preparing for the upcoming general election in 2020, the vice-chairman said the party wants their lawmakers to be strong, active and dutiful politicians who the public can rely on.

“We understand that we all have difficult times in the Parliament as well as on the ground. We want our lawmakers to be strong, active and dutiful people who also can strengthen the party with their work and are also able to stand firmly for the people,” he explained.

“We will only keep the lawmakers who work compassionately for the people with a strong commitment to the party and who strictly follow the rules and regulations of the party,” he added.

The NLD has issued warnings and expelled a number of its members and lawmakers on the grounds of breaking party rules since it was sworn in as the ruling party.

Earlier this month, Yangon regional lawmaker U Kyaw Zeya and Upper House lawmaker Daw Thet Thet Khine, both outspoken and popular lawmakers, were purged from the executive committee of their respective township chapters.

NLD’s chairperson for Kayah State, Daw Khin Sithu; Shan State’s chairperson Daw Moe Moe; youth leader U Soe Moe Thu; former army captain and representative U Nyan Lin of Shwepyithar Township in Yangon; and representative U Sein Win from Maubin in Irrawaddy Region, all had party jobs taken from them during 2017.

Three more lawmakers were reprimanded in April this year including Upper House representative U Pe Chit; representative U Than Swe of Seikkyi Kanaungto constituency in Yangon; and Mon State representative and Minister for Electricity, Energy and Industry U Min Htin Aung Han.

Link: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/nld-purge-ineffective-members-parliament.html>

Small political parties prepare for 2020 elections despite losses

Myanmar Times, 1 October 2018



Did you know that there are nearly 100 political parties in Myanmar besides the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)? Most of these are regional and state parties. And while they may have been insignificant in past elections, they have never stopped looking for ways to win.

Since 2011, when the multi-party system began, 95 political parties have registered with the Elections Commission.

“Many parties means people are interested in politics. They want to participate in politics by pushing for their

ideals through a political party,” U Thu Wai, chair of the Democratic Party-Myanmar and a veteran politician since the era of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League during the colonial period.

According to the commission, over 90 political parties contested for 1171 seats in the Lower House, Upper House, and regional and state parliaments in the 2015 general election.

Most the parties competed in fewer than ten constituencies, while only six parties contested in hundreds of constituencies.

Seven parties fielded candidates for more than 100 seats in state and regional parliaments. In Shan State, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, one of the strongest ethnic parties, competed for 120 seats, and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy competed for 90 seats.

The rest of the parties competed only in places where they thought they had a good chance of winning.

Only 20 political parties recorded victories in the last elections. The NLD won the most seats, followed by the USDP, Rakhine National Party and Shan Nationalities League. The rest won only one seat each.

Despite their poor performance in the last elections, most of these parties are determined to field candidates in the next election.

“We want to contribute to the country’s democracy. A party can do far more things than an individual. Pointing out mistakes as a party is more effective. Even if we don’t get into parliament, we want a chance to be heard and give advice to the government outside parliament,” said U Ye Tun, 88 Generation Student Youths Party chairman.

The party competed for 39 seats in the 2010 election and won one seat. It competed again for 47 seats in the 2015 election but failed to capture a single seat.

“There were many difficulties. We had to rent a place for our office, recruit party members and hold campaign events. Although we didn’t win, we had to make the effort to keep our party in the public eye. We even had to mortgage our houses and land to keep the party going,” said U Ye Tun.

More than 50 ethnic parties are also registered with the commission.

Small ethnic parties are formed with the aim of promoting their ethnic groups rather than getting into power.

Myanmar politics was dominated by one party for over half a century, and the transition to parliamentary democracy has given ethnic political parties the chance to pursue their own agendas.

U Salai Aung Min Hlaing, secretary of the Asho Chin National Party, said his party pushes for the rights of the ethnic Chin.

“It was formed to preserve, promote, and acquire the rights of the Chin people. We feel that our advocacy has been made more effective by forming a political party,” he said. The party competed for eight seats in 2015 but didn’t win any.

U Arr Lal, secretary of the Akha National Development Party in Shan State, said they formed the party to unite the Akha people.

“The Akha are the third largest ethnic group in eastern Shan. They have been led by religion for hundreds of

years, and it is not easy for a religion to lead a people. Our people worship Buddhism, traditional spiritualism, and Christianity, he said.

In 2015, it competed for six seats and won the Akha Ethnic Affairs minister post. In the 2017 by-elections, it was not as lucky.

Despite the losses, U Arr Lal said the enthusiasm of his party's members has not waned.

From 2010-2018, the commission abolished 15 political parties, eight of them for failing to compete in at least three constituencies in an election. According to the law, failing to field at least three candidates in an election results in a party losing its accreditation. The other parties were disqualified for merging with other parties.

U Saw Myint Htwe, secretary of the Kayin National Democratic Party, which was formed as a result of the merger of three parties, said the merger was aimed at giving people stronger political representation.

"The people wanted us to merge, so we did, even though our policies are different," he said.

Despite the difficulties they face, small political parties believe they play an important role in the country's transition to democracy because the voices of all people need to be heard.

Leaders of the parties believe that eventually they will become part of a coalition government in which they can best represent the interests of their people. Their commitment to democratic electoral politics remains strong despite setbacks.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/small-political-parties-prepare-2020-elections-despite-losses.html>

State Counsellor's Office stresses need to amend 2008 Constitution

Myanmar Times, 20 September 2018

Myanmar's democratisation can only be achieved if the 2008 Constitution is amended step by step through negotiations, U Kyaw Tint Swe, minister of the State Counsellor's Office, told parliament on Wednesday.

He said a stable and strong democratic transformation is necessary before the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government can bring about a federal union of which all citizens could be proud.

"Freedom, equality and mutual respect can be built among ethnic groups if a democratic federal union can be implemented," he added.

He said he hoped that the goal of the peace process is to reach agreements on the establishment of a democratic federal union and the signing of a union agreement.



He stressed the importance of political dialogue to agree on basic principles included in the agreement.

He also said the Tatmadaw (military) has a key role in ensuring that such an agreement could be implemented.

“In pursuing a well-balanced peace process, many challenges need to be overcome,” he said.

The government will move forward in stages to achieve democratic norms and the establishment of a federal union, he said.

The current government has held three sessions of the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, which produced 51 points of agreement. At the second session, points related to secession, such as the right to self-determination and the right for the states to draw up basic laws, were agreed to but omitted at the last minute, said U Kyaw Tint Swe.

“Although secession is important, it is more important for everyone to cooperate in building a federal union where secession is not necessary,” he said.

In his 50-minute presentation to parliament, U Kyaw Tint Swe also talked about the progress the government has made in education, health and law enforcement.

U Sai Thant Sin, Pyithu Hluttaw MP of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, said the presentation appeared like a campaign spiel as the November 3 by-elections approach.

“Such a presentation is aimed at wooing voters to support the ruling party,” he said. “You can think what you like, but they should not forget their pledges during the last elections.”

U Oo Hla Saw, Pyithu Hluttaw MP of the Rakhine National Party, also criticised the minister’s speech.

“Including unsolved problems in an important policy speech is trivialising these problems. I am dissatisfied, as the speech didn’t say anything about attaining peace and socio-economic development,” he said.

Telling the public through parliament about attempts to amend the constitution and other government programmes looks like a by-election campaign speech, said U Thein Tun Oo, USDP spokesperson.

Link: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/state-counsellors-office-stresses-need-amend-2008-constitution.html>

OTHERS

No permission has been granted for construction of 10,000-ton cement plant – Gen Saw Johnny

Karen Information Center, 3 October 2018

The Karen National Union (KNU) has not permitted the construction of a cement plant in Hlaingbwe Township under its controlled area, according to Gen. Saw Johnny, chief of staff of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) under the KNU.



Yadanar Sai Kaung Myat Kyaw Company has earmarked the construction of the cement plant near Hnget Pyaw Taw Village under Yin Bai Village Group in Shan Ywar Thit under Hlaingbwe Township.

“We won’t accept projects that will bring negative impact to the public. We will consider it if it will bring benefits to the public.”

Everything depends on the public's desire. We've learned that the company has earmarked the project. We haven't given our permission yet," Gen Saw Johnny said to KIC News on October 2.

He continued that the KNU will stand by its policy and the company has met with the KNU to discuss the project but the decision will be made only after it has been submitted to the central executive committee.

An official from the company has said the proposed cement plant will produce 10,000 tons per day and the company will invest US\$760 million in this plant. The cement plant will be built using latest technology and it will offer jobs to around 5,000 local residents.

Yadanar Sai Kaung Myat Kyaw Company held a meeting with local authorities on September 23 to discuss the cement plant project and sought the opinion of local residents from Shan Ywar Thit project area.

"Civil organizations weren't invited to the events relating to the project. They stated that there will be minimum impact. However, the local residents should be informed about how they plan to proceed in terms of technology. The project should be carried out in accordance with existing law in Myanmar and international standard and the involvement of local residents from various layers should be allowed," said Saw Thar Boe from the Karen Rivers Watch.

He added that the local residents and civil organizations have been feeling concerned over the cement plant project and the project may affect the ongoing peace process in Myanmar if it is carried out without giving a clear explanation to the local residents.

The company will pay compensation to the owners of farmlands and plantations that are included in the project area and it has reached an initial agreement with respective state ministry to build the cement plant.

Link: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/no-permission-has-been-granted-construction-10000-ton-cement-plant-gen-saw-johnny>

Personal leadership training provided to ten village-tracts under Don Yin Township

Karen Information Center, 4 October 2018

The Karen Youth Organization (KYO) is providing personal leadership training to local youths at Kawt Hmu Nat Village of Don Yin Township under the Karen National Union (KNU)'s Hpa-an District from October 3 to 5.

Saw Raymond, trainer and leading patron of Swe Thahar Organization, said the KYO and his organization are cooperating in providing the three-day training.

"This training aims to teach the youths to become self-aware and learn how to become successful and achieve their goals so that they can know how to lead themselves before leading others," he said to KIC News.



The training will cover topics on personal leadership, accountability and responsibility, win-win solution, and mutual understanding.

A total of 35 trainees including KYO youths and local youths from ten village-tracts under Don Yin Township are attending the training, according to the officials of the training.

“I’m attending this training to assist the youths from our Don Yin Township to have good spirits, develop their knowledge and skills, and become successful and also to gain knowledge for myself,” said Saw Aung Zaw Oo, a trainee from Kawt Hmu Nat Village of Don Yin Township.

The KYO and Swe Thahar Organization have cooperated in conducting personal leadership training in Thandaung, Kyainseikgyi, and Kawkareik townships in the Karen State and the next training will be conducted in Pai Kyone Township, according to Swe Thahar Group.

Link: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/personal-leadership-training-provided-ten-village-tracts-under-don-yin-township>

KNU Brigade 7 plans to build housing, highway bus terminal in Myawaddy

Karen Information Center, 24 September 2018

The Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 7’s Stepping Stone Company Limited is planning to build a low-cost housing project in Myawaddy for Karen (Kayin) people living in refugee camps at the border area, migrant workers, and local residents.



Starting from the end of this year, Sein Lei Myaing project will be implemented on 48 acres of land besides the Asia Highway, which is located four miles from the Myawaddy-Mae Sot Friendship Bridge in Myawaddy, Karen State, according to the project coordinator Lt. Mo Shay.

“Our aim is to provide affordable apartments to the Karen people from the refugee camps and workers who are making a bare living so that they can buy them instead of renting in other places,” he told KIC News.

Sein Lei Myaing project will include over 10,000 housing units, a market, a hall, a school, a hospital/health center, a playground, and a garden and a highway bus terminal will

also be built for parking.

Buyers can purchase the apartments under a 20-year installment plan starting from a monthly payment of Ks 100,000 and early buyers can start living in completed apartments within the first three or five years of the project.

Among the companies under the KNU Brigade 7, this is the first time one of the companies is implementing the project with permission from the Karen State’s government.

Link: <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/knu-brigade-7-plans-build-housing-highway-bus-terminal-myawaddy>

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