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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

National-level political dialogues to be held in Kayin State, Tanintharyi Region and Nay Pyi Taw

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 18 December 2016

A meeting of representatives of the secretariat of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee UPDJC was held at the branch office of the National Reconciliation Peace Centre in Yangon yesterday.



Arrangements are being made to release the nomination of representatives from the government, ethnic armed groups, and political parties for the national-level dialogues in Kayin State, taninthayi Region and Nay Pyi taw councils within a week, it is learnt.

U Hla Maung Shwe, the secretary of the UPDJC for the government, said that there were three locations which had already been organizing national-level political dialogues and the nominees for supervisory committees approved by the government will be announced in the coming week, followed by an announcement of nominees for work committees. He also added that preliminary meetings for the national-level political dialogues might be held in December or January and they were working with the KNU, KNLA-PC and the DKBA for the dialogues.

It is also learnt that national-level political dialogues for ethnics in Kayin State, national-level political dialogues for the tanintharyi Region and national-level political dialogues for issues participated by civil society organizations will be held. the outcomes of the dialogues will be submitted to the Second Panglong Union Peace Conference in February in accordance with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/18_dec_16_gnlm

UNFC reiterates all-inclusiveness in Peace Process

Mizzima, 14 December 2016

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a coalition of armed ethnic groups that did not sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, have called again on the NLD-led Government to make

the peace process all-inclusive.

In the statement, issued on 13 December, the UNFC says ‘. . . it necessary to create a good environment in which peaceful dialogue and negotiation can be held and arrange for all-inclusiveness, for the establishment of a genuine democratic federal union. With this statement, we would like to inform that our UNFC, will continue to stand for all-inclusiveness, seek dialogue with the government, and endeavour for the people and the international community to be able to help and support the process.’



The UNFC includes among its membership organisations which have formed the Northern Alliance – Burma (NA-B) which is currently fighting the Myanmar Army in Shan State. In the alliance, three of the groups, the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) have been excluded from the peace process.

Link: <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/unfc-reiterates-all-inclusiveness-peace-process>

KNU 16th Congress to Be Held in March 2017

Burma News International, 8 December 2016

The 16th Congress of the Karen National Union (KNU), which was originally scheduled for November before being postponed, will start on 14 March 2017.



The Congress Preparatory Committee Chairman and KNU General Secretary (1), Padoh Saw Thawthi Bwe, said that the KNU Central Executive Committee had confirmed the date during a meeting at Thay Bay Hta in the KNU district of Hpa-an on 3 December.

He said to KIC News: “The exact date for holding the congress has been set and was approved by 10 out of 11 Central Executive Committee members.”

A total of 175 people from seven KNU-controlled districts will attend the congress – 25 representatives and observers from each district. Representatives from other KNU departments will also attend. The number of representatives attending from each department will depend on the staff numbers of each department.

No decisions have yet been made about inviting representatives from local Karen political parties, social organizations and Karen communities abroad. According to the KNU the Invitation Committee will decide on whom to invite.

During the KNU Central Standing Committee Meeting, held in November, 10 committees, including the Congress Preparatory Committee, were formed to help organize the 16th Congress.

Link: <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/2564-knu-16th-congress-to-be-held-in-march-2016.html>

Karen EAOs and Political Parties Attend Federalism Workshop

Karen News, 7 December 2016

Three Karen ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and four Karen political parties held their first federalism workshop at Lay Kay Kaw Myothit in Myawaddy Township, Karen State from 29 to 30 November.

Saw Tar Mu Lar, the Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman's Office Secretary, said: "People are very keen to know about this issue [federalism]. We won't get what we want if we don't know about this [federalism], so, we arranged this [workshop] to teach about federalism."

The workshop was organized by the Euro-Burma Office (EBO) and the Forum of Federation (FOF), 69 people attended.

They included representatives from: the KNU, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), the Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party, the United Karen National Democratic Party, the Karen State Democracy and Development Party, and the Karen Democratic Party.



During the workshop, FOF discussed: federalism and decentralization, distribution of power, opportunities for decentralization, diversity management in federalism, decentralization and regional governments, schemes for distribution of finances and research relating to federalism.

EBO is a non-governmental organization that is financed by Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Finland with the aim of assisting in Burma's peace process by doing things such as arranging meetings between the Burmese government and ethnic armed organizations and giving training.

Since the KNU, DKBA and KNU/KNLA-PC signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) last October they have been cooperating more with international groups, social organizations and experts helping them to hold workshops and training sessions that will help the peace process.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2016/12/karen-eaos-and-political-parties-attend-federalism-workshop.html/>

ICRC Trains KNLA on Law of Armed Conflict

Karen News, 7 December 2016

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recently gave training on the law of armed conflict (LOAC) to senior military leaders of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).



Over 40 military leaders from the KNLA under the KNU Brigade 7 attended the training, which was held in an area under the control of the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 7 on 28 and 29 November, according to Lieutenant Saw Swee Nay Soe from the KNLA, who led the training.

He said: “The main focus [of the training] was to teach how to protect civilians during a battle, how to treat prisoners of war and laws of conflict set down by the international [community] on preventing civilians from getting hurt before waging a battle.”

He also said that though the KNLA already have their own laws of armed conflict they held the training so that they could learn about the international laws of armed conflict and compare them with the KNLA laws of conflict.

A KNLA official who attended the training said: “We already had prior knowledge of international laws relating to the military. But we learned more when they came to train us. There isn’t much difference between their regulations and our existing regulations.”

The ICRC previously gave training to the KNLA on the laws of conflict in 2013 and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) gave awareness training in cooperation with the KNU in September of this year on how to prevent the use of child soldiers.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2016/12/icrc-trains-knla-on-law-of-armed-conflict.html/>

ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Govt Pilot Project Introduces Digital ID Cards

The Irrawaddy, 15 December 2016

RANGOON — the Burmese government is conducting a pilot project to substitute paper National Registration Cards with “smarter” digital identification cards in Naypyidaw and Mandalay.

The National Registration Cards, also known as citizenship scrutiny cards, are issued to Burmese citizens by the Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Population’s national registration department.

Minister U Thein Swe provided background information on the project after a Lower House lawmaker inquired about the ministry’s plan for “smarter” national ID cards during Wednesday’s parliamentary session.

“The plan to replace National Registration Cards with Smart Cards is a priority in the e-government system” the minister told lawmakers.



U Thein Swe said that after the pilot project in Naypyidaw and Mandalay is finished, the project will be implemented in other states and divisions.

The pilot project launched in some townships in Naypyidaw last week and in Mandalay on December 13.

In order to carry out the initiative, immigration officers record citizens’ fingerprints, eye scans, and take a photo of each individual, according to the ministry.

The minister added that they also welcome suggestions and insights on the process from local and international

experts, including those from IT companies in neighboring countries that are already using digital ID cards.

The minister said that currently approximately 37 million people out of more than 53 million people in Burma hold the pink paper National Registration Cards.

Link: <http://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/govt-pilot-project-introduces-digital-id-cards.html>

1000 teachers to be trained for children with special needs

Myanmar Times, 14 December 2016

In order to improve education prospects for children with intellectual disabilities, the Myanmar Special Education Association (MSEA) has announced plans to pay for up to 1000 teachers across the country to undergo specialized training in 2017.

The exclusion of, discrimination against and lack of support for people with disabilities in Myanmar are significant. Over 2.3 million people have some form of disability and, according to a 2010 nationwide report from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, 53 percent of people with disabilities do not have access to education while only 2pc hold bachelor's degrees.

Currently only around 20 schools in the country are estimated to have teachers specially trained to work with children with disabilities, with the vast majority of those teachers located in Yangon and Mandalay. MSEA's training program hopes to change this and better cater to the 66pc of the country that resides in rural areas.

"We will pay for teacher training in all districts and regions," said MSEA national coordinator L Zaw Dim. "We expect we will get 800 to 1000 teachers to attend."

The training programs, which take around three months to complete, will commence in February 2017.

Any teachers wishing to be involved in the training program should contact the MSEA or the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/24191-1000-teachers-to-be-trained-for-children-with-special-needs.html>

Prawns from Taninthayi to be bought by Japan, China, Thailand

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 13 December 2016

Japan, China and Thailand have proposed to purchase saltwater white prawns farmed in Taninthayi Region, said U Kyaw Lin, a project manager of Katalu saltwater prawn farms.

The saltwater prawns are being farmed in Katalu village, Katan Island in Taninthayi Region with the use of modern technology.

Thailand is the main buyer of these prawns. The shrimp species are imported from Thailand to farm. In prawn farming, a prawn lake can produce about 20 tons of prawn annually at a minimum, it is learnt.

A kilo of white prawns consisting of 40 prawns or more sells for 130 to 150 Bahts, whereas a kilo of white prawns consisting of 40 prawns or less is offered at 150 to 160 Bahts. Currently, there are 20 prawn-farming lakes, with plans to extend farms into 32 more lakes in the coming year, according to U Kyaw Lin.

The imported pedigree prawn species continue to be farmed in pahtaw pahtet Island to meet market criteria, it is learnt.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/13_dec_16_gnlm

Govt to open one-stop centres for domestic violence survivors

Myanmar Times, 12 December 2016

Women's groups have welcomed a government initiative to help women who have experienced domestic violence, and called for the project, so far limited to Yangon and Mandalay, to be extended throughout the country.

The new One-Stop Women's Support Centre (OSWSC) was set up to help women who have suffered violence and abuse. It will open at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement's vocational training centres in Yangon and Mandalay before the end of the year, ministry officials have said.

The centres will offer medical check-ups, shelter for mothers and children, legal advice on their rights and support in the event of a prosecution.

Naw Tha Wah, director of the Women's Development Division of the social welfare department, said it was difficult for women to explain their plight to a string of police, hospital staffers, and other officials. Those who came to the OSWSC would be asked to fill in only one form.

"A woman who has suffered violence only needs to come to our office and fill in the one form. We will help her in the event of legal or criminal action according to her wishes," she said.

The ministry is aiming for each centre to support 100 women, and has asked the government for a budget of K500,000 per woman supported. The centres will be staffed by medical professionals, police, officers with legal experience and administrative workers.

Daw San San Aye, director general of the Social Welfare Department, said, "Women who live outside Yangon or Mandalay can contact the Department of Social Welfare on the hot line, 067- 404666, or 067-404777. We will try to open an OSWSC in other states and regions, but we face budgetary constraints that limit us from placing shelters in other locations. We will extend the project as our budget increases."

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/24148-govt-to-open-one-stop-centres-for-domestic-violence-survivors.html>

Japan Grants US\$719,857 for five projects for construction of schools in Bago Region, Ayeyawady Region and Chin State

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 10 December 2016

MR. Tateshi HIGUCHI, Ambassador of Japan to Myanmar, and chairpersons of the School construction Committees concerned signed the grant contracts for five projects on Thursday.

Under these contracts, Japan's Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) Scheme will provide a total of US\$ 719,857 to five projects for construction of schools.



The projects include construction of Nga Pyaw Taw Village Basic Education Primary School in Letpadan Township, Bago Region, construction of Kyon Taing Village Basic education High School in Wakema Township,

Ayeyarwady Region; construction of Auk Yin Village Basic Education Primary School in Kanpetlet Township, Chin State; construction of Lailinpi Village Basic education High School in Matupi Township, chin State and construction of Sakhai Village Basic education Middle School in Matupi Township, Chin State.

The grant contracts except 2 are to assist the ones out of 493 flood affected schools requested by the Myanmar Government to the Japanese Government for the reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Link: https://issuu.com/myanmarnewspaper/docs/10_dec_16_gnlm

Mon State Gov't funds 15 million Kyat for Karen New Year

Mon News Agency, 8 December 2016

The Mon State Government will deliver 15 million Kyat in support for the Karen New Year festival celebration which will be held on December 29.

It is the Mon State Government's first time financially supporting the Karen New Year Festival celebration, according to U Aung Myint Khine, Minister of Karen Ethnic Affairs.

"Since this is the first time they have offered funding for the Karen New Year celebration, it feels like they acknowledge us, as an ethnic minority [in the state]. This amount of support, whether it is big or not, displays unity and trust among ethnic groups and it is great to see," said the Minister of Karen Ethnic Affairs.



The Karen New Year Festival Organizing Committee from each of Mon State's 10 townships can collect 1,500,000 Kyat from the Mon State Government on December 8.

"The Mon State Government supports this as it wants to maintain the ethnic groups' traditional customs. This new government [National League for Democracy] hasn't just provided such support in Mon State, but in other regions too," said U Saw Chit Taung, an official of Karen Ethnic Affairs Ministry.

At the New Year Festival, the festival goers will pay respect to the Karen National Flag, while traditional boxing, Karen traditional dances and modern musical acts will also take place.

Link: <http://monnews.org/2016/12/08/mon-state-govt-funds-15-million-kyat-for-karen-new-year/>

First Naypyidaw Karen New Year Celebrations

Burma News International, 6 December 2016

Karen Members of Parliament (MPs) will lead the first Naypyidaw Karen New Year Festival when the 79th New Year Festival is held at the MCC-2 Hall in Naypyidaw on 29 December.



Saw Shar Phaung Awar, the Naypyidaw Karen New Year Organizing Committee Joint Secretary told KIC News that it was decided to hold the festival in Naypyidaw at a meeting held at the Naypyidaw Sebin Guesthouse on 19 November.

He said: “The Karen New Year was recognized by the Hluttaw (Parliament). So, this is an act of preserving it. All the Karen MPs want to preserve our Karen New Year. [The Karen New Year ceremony] will be held with the aim to unite all ethnic people and [help them to] work together.”

Naypyidaw residents and people from over 70 Karen villages in Pynmana, Leway, and Tatgone townships will attend the Naypyidaw Karen New Year Festival.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and government officials will also be invited to the festival.

According to the committee, the Karen New Year Festival will include the summoning of the Karen traditional rice guardian, a traditional culture exhibition, and traditional dance performances by Karen dance troupes from each state and region.

The British colonial administration recognized the Karen New Year as a public holiday in 1937. The Karen people living in Burma and around the world celebrate it on the first day of the month of Pyatho (the 10th month of the Burmese calendar) while Pantanaw Township and some villages in the Irrawaddy Region celebrate the Karen New Year on the first day of the month of Tabodwe (the 11th month of the Burmese calendar).

This year, the Karen New Year falls on 29 December.

There are 21 members of the Naypyidaw Karen New Year Organising Committee. The chairman is Mahn Saw Tin Win, the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) MP for Kyain Seikgyi Township in Karen State; the secretary is Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe a Rangoon Region Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house) MP; and the joint secretary is Saw Shar Phaung Awar, the Kyain Seikgyi Township Amyotha Hluttaw MP.

Other members of the committee include: Mahn Win Khaing Than, the Amyotha Hluttaw Speaker; Mahn Johnny, the Irrawaddy Region Chief Minister; and Nan Khin Htwe Myint, the Karen State Chief Minister.

Link: <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/2556-first-naypyidaw-karen-new-yearcelebrations.html>

Government plans Hpa-an zone to kick-start Kayin economy

Myanmar Times, 5 December 2016

In an attempt to boost the economy of Kayin State, the government has announced a strategy to attract entrepreneurs to the Hpa-an industrial zone in the state capital. Deputy planning

minister U Maung Maung Win told parliament on December 1 that the plan involved worker training and development, and improved infrastructure.

“Domestic and foreign investors will be invited and strategy and tactics worked out to develop Hpa-an industrial zone,” the deputy minister told MPs.

The deputy minister also pledged that the government would ensure high-tech support for the companies that would invest in the zone – including a reliable electricity supply – to enable them to produce high-quality products on a continuous basis.



He said about 90 people were now working in nine businesses that were already up and running, and a further 810 workers were undergoing training to take up jobs in two garment factories that would open soon.

The development of the Hpa-an industrial zone has been delayed because of disputes over the ownership of nearby farmland, and because of the general sluggishness of the local Kayin State economy. The 969-acre zone was set up in 2011.

Link: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/business/24044-government-plans-hpa-an-zone-to-kick-start-kayin-economy.html>

Rubber prices increase to nearly 1000 Kyat per pound

Mon News Agency, 2 December 2016

The price of rubber has gone up in Mon State, with one pound of RSS-3 [Ribbed Smoked Sheets 3] costing 990 Kyat as of December 1.



The current price for a thick rubber sheet is between 700 to 770 Kyat per pound, and the thin rubber-sheet type costs 800 to 995 Kyat.

“The price of rubber today is 995 Kyat. The price given is dependent on the quality of the rubber. If the rubber is good, the price will be good. If the rubber is very wet, although it is a type of RSS-3, the price will only be 800 Kyat. Thick rubber costs 700-770 Kyat while the thin can be from 800 to 900 Kyat,” said U Thura, manager of Pushin Rubber Trading Factory, in Mudon Township.

“Our rubber price goes up because China’s economic market surges and our rubber market rely on the Chinese market,” said Nai Kyan Yit, chairman of Mon State Rubber Cultivation Association.

Nai Kyan Yit added that according to a business person from Singapore speaking at a workshop in Dawei Town, the price of rubber will continue to increase until 2020. In 2017, the price may increase up to 2000 Kyat per pound.

Rubber trading and procurement centers assert that Thailand produced the most rubber globally. However, after the rubber price went down, the Thai government suggested to its people to cut down the rubber trees and replace them with other valuable trees. Now, the rubber price goes up as there is less rubber production in

Thailand. Still, some said that the rubber price would surge as the country's currency, the Kyat, dives, and as the world stock market climbs.

Link: <http://monnews.org/2016/12/02/rubber-prices-increase-to-nearly-1000-kyat-per-pound/>

Yangon master plan to be finalized this year

The Nation, 5 December 2016

The master plan for Yangon, Myanmar's commercial hub is scheduled to be unveiled by the end of this year, according to Phyo Min Thein, Yangon region chief minister.

Phyo Min Thein said at Vice President Myint Swe's meeting with Myanmar businesses last week that the plan would consist of building a new deep-sea port, a new economic zone, the New Yangon project, and a variety of residential housing – low-cost, mid-range, and high-standard.

"Now we are seriously observing all the potential places in Yangon. We will be implementing new residential housing projects in all four directions – east, west, north, and south of Yangon.

"When we say low-cost housing, it does not mean that it is below the standards. We are worried about that and will make sure people can buy quality apartments at their affordable prices," he said.

"Once we finish all our on-ground observations, we will invite all the business people in the construction industry to explain them about our projects.

"We will provide them with all the necessary information so that we can prevent speculation. We are now making our best efforts to make it happen. Once we make it public, construction businesses will have a lot of opportunities."

The chief minister said that the state will manage the land of the New Yangon project, part of the master plan.

He said that all the construction phases and infrastructure projects involved will be open to local businesses through the tender system. He promised to ensure a transparent and inclusive process when it comes to selection of developers.

Phyo Min Thein hinted that the government might control extremely high land prices in the city.

Link: http://www.nationmultimedia.com/news/aec/asean_plus/30301437

LAND AND PROPERTY

KNU and Karen State Government Meet to Discuss Land Issues

Karen News, 17 December 2016

The Karen National Union (KNU) met with officials from the Karen State Government to discuss cooperation on solving ongoing and future land issues on 6 December at the Karen State Government office.

Karen State Government officials including the Security and Border Affairs Minister Colonel Aung Lwin and the Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation Minister Saw Myint Oo met with the KNU delegation led by Joint Secretary (2) Padoh Mahn Mahn and the KNU Forestry Department head Padoh Mahn Ba Tun.

Padoh Mahn Mahn spoke to *Karen News* about the meeting.

“There are two main reasons for the meeting: how to cooperate in solving land issues and how to coordinate the [Burmese] government’s land policy and our land policy.”

Padoh Mahn Mahn said that both sides had agreed on practical methods to achieve those aims, such as holding workshops to coordinate land issues in January.



This meeting was the first informal talks on land issues between the KNU and the Karen State Government since the KNU signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). As well as land issues implementation of the peace process was also discussed at the meeting.

The Karen State Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation Minister Saw Myint Oo said: “The peace process evolves as a result of meetings like this. There are land issues in the [Karen] state, they are very broad and no decisions have yet been made. We have talked about meeting up again to discuss the details.”

According to the rules laid down for implementing the NCA land and the natural environment are one of the five main topics that have to be discussed as part of the political dialogue.

Currently, there are ongoing land disputes and land confiscations in Karen State and in KNU-controlled areas. The KNU enacted a land policy in December last year that has been providing land registration and land measurement in Karen areas under its control.

Link: <http://karennews.org/2016/12/knu-and-karen-state-government-meet-to-discuss-land-issues.html/>

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