



BURMA REPORT

October 2011
မြန်မာ - မှတ်တမ်း

Issue N° 101

Free all political prisoners, free Burma.

Between news <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, [NLDmembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK], Mon, 19. Sep 2011 04:45:26

Positive change in Myanmar seen by Aung San Suu Kyi

By **Between News**, September 19, 2011 - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/news-article/positive-change-in-myanmar-seen-by-aung-san-suu-kyi>>

The long-suffering people are still far from real freedom although democracy Aung San Suu Kyi believes there are signs of political change in Myanmar after decades of military rule.

The new government appears genuine in its desire for democratic reform, the Nobel Peace Prize winner told AFP in an exclusive interview. She also said that an Arab-style uprising is not the answer to the country's problems.



Aung San Suu Kyi believes there are signs of political change in Myanmar. @SKNVibes

The opposition leader said that there have been positive developments at her party offices in Yangon. She had always said that she is a cautious optimist and has remained so. She believes that President Thein Sein would like to bring about positive changes but how he will achieve what he wants is a question that has to be examined.

The new administration has shown signs of reaching out to critics including to Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) party which won in the 1990 election but was never allowed to assume office.

Suu Kyi said that although details of her discussion with President Thein Sein were not revealed, they had areas of agreement particularly with what they wanted for the country.

What the top adviser to the president told AFP regarding the controversial law that prevents prisoners from being political party members being considered for revision is one sign that the authorities wanted to engage with the opposition. The act was promulgated by the military government which is being considered for review by the current parliament.

Suu Kyi said it was too soon to say whether her party would contest the next election in 2015 but the democracy icon said she was ready to lead the country if the people do so desire. The foregoing news is sourced from AFP.

THE BURMANET NEWS - September 16, 2011 Issue #4270, newsletter covering Burma, "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org
September 16, Agence France Presse - <<http://news.yahoo.com/clinton-urges-concrete-actions-myanmar-rights-214027001.html>>

Clinton urges 'concrete actions' by Myanmar on rights

San Francisco — US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Thursday urged Myanmar to take "concrete actions" to improve human rights, voicing concerns about the new government's record despite its outreach.

Clinton, addressing a joint news conference after talks with Australian leaders, said that the new US coordinator on Myanmar, Derek Mitchell, had "productive meetings" on his first visit to the country this week.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has urged Burma to take 'concrete actions' to improve human rights.

But she added: "Frankly, we have serious questions and concerns across a wide range of issues."

She said that the military-backed government in the country formerly known as Burma continued to hold some 2,000 political prisoners and to mistreat ethnic minorities and the media.

"I would urge the Burmese government to follow its words and commitments with concrete actions that lead to genuine reform, national reconciliation and respect for human rights," Clinton said.

Myanmar's then military rulers last year held rare elections and later nominally handed over power to civilians. The opposition and the United States branded the moves as a sham meant to cement the military's control.

But the government has also taken gestures including releasing opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate who had spent most of the previous two decades under house arrest.

President Barack Obama's administration in 2009 opened a dialogue with Myanmar, concluding that the previous policy of seeking to isolate the regime has failed. But the United States has said it will only lift sanctions once it sees progress..

Shan-EU <shaneu31@yahoo.com>, [Shan-EUgroup] BURMA'S RECONCILIATION: Piecemeal reform process or holistic approach?, Thu, 15. Sep 2011 09:11:49

Shan Herald – Agency for News Opinions Thursday, 15 September 2011 12:32 - Sai Wansai

BURMA'S RECONCILIATION: Piecemeal reform process or holistic approach?

<http://www.shanland.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4040:burmas-reconciliation-piecemeal-reform-process-or-holistic-approach&catid=115:opinions&Itemid=308>

Now that the Naypyidaw has dropped its Border Guard Force (BGF) plan and signed a new ceasefire deal with the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and its ally, the Mongla Group, known as National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) and non-Burman ethnic groups in general start to wonder, if this is a shift of government's policy from hard-line stance to a more pragmatic one, particularly where its peace initiative launched a few weeks ago is concerned. A closer look at the ongoing development would indicate that this is not the case.

A closer look at the ongoing development would indicate that this is not the case.

According to the 2008 Constitution, all the armed forces in the union shall be under the command of the Defence Services, and the BGF implementation is to realise this Naypyidaw's goal, which is an ongoing process, followed literally without deviation, according to its prescribed policy.

Starting from April 2009, the previous SPDC military regime had pressured all the ethnic ceasefire armies to transform their units into BGF battalions under the command of the Burma Army and that is still the norm for Thein Sein government.

Since 1994, 17 major anti-government ethnic armed groups and 23 other small groups have either surrendered or signed ceasefire agreement with the government. In principle, weaker armed groups were pressured to surrender, transformed into BGF or forced to become government militias, while the sizeable ones were accorded to ceasefire status in their own regions, enjoying self-administration, with military outfit intact.

In August 2009, the Kokang group, known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), with around 1,000 to 1,500 soldiers, was attacked and overrun by the Burma Army and later installed the deputy chairman Bai Suoqian. Chairman Pheung Kya-shin, who was opposed to the BGF plan labelled drug trafficker, gun runner and criminalised, while Bai Suoqian, who supported it was backed and groomed. Clearly, the Burma Army or the then SPDC regime took the opportunity of the split and sided with Bai Suoqian. A case in point of the classical "divide and rule" mantra at work.



Sai Wansai

This year, on August 18, in line with 2008 Constitution that all armed forces must come under the Burma Army, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was dissolved and transformed into a border guard force with 12 battalions

under the command of the Burma Army, according to the report from The New Light of Myanmar, citing the Karen State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP). The party, which was set up to contest the November 7 general election, confirmed that "There is no DKBA any more". Again, no one doubts that KSDDP statement is actually the handiwork of the civilianised, ex-military dominated government.

Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) asked why Naypyitaw had no longer insisted that the Wa and Mongla become Border Guard Forces (BGFs) as demanded earlier, an officer from NDAA said, "We put the same question to the Burmese representatives and they said it was the previous military government's program."

This non-committal answer could be taken that the regime is becoming more flexible or it has positioned itself as nothing to do with the previous, SPDC government's BGF plan. But all developments prior to these recent meetings with UWSA and NDAA indicate that the core BGF policy based on its self-drawn 2008 Constitution is being pursued by Naypyidaw with unwavering commitment. The recent dropping of BGF demand on the two groups, leading to the temporary ceasefire pact, might be just a tactical move and has nothing to do with altering its strategic goal in anyway.

Naypyidaw signed ceasefire agreements with the UWSA and NDAA on the 6th and 7th September respectively, which includes, no hostilities, reopening of liaison offices, advanced notification when entering each side's territory carrying arms, and a joint coordination team for regional development.

Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSA) criticised the Naypyidaw signed ceasefire agreement with groups that have not fought against it as a non-starter, while making token approach to armed groups that have been fighting against it.

Major Sai La, the SSPP/SSA spokesman, likened the regime's move to applying remedy at the wrong location. He also said that this amount to driving a wedge between the UNFC members and non-members like UWSA and NDAA.

The UNFC formed in February 2011, is composed of six armed groups as permanent members: the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the Chin National Front (CNF), the Kachin Independence Organization, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA).

Nai Hongsa, General Secretary of UNFC, bemoaned that it was a great loss for all non-Burman ethnic groups to let military break up ethnic unity easily and that it showed that the ethnic armed groups were not united enough.

Either way, there is no point in blaming the Naypyidaw for its "divide and rule" policy, which in essence is its business to keep the opposition camps divided, so that it could maintain its "top dog" position. Instead, the UNFC and all other opposition camps, armed or unarmed, should find a way to build a grand coalition and show that it is a viable alternative to the present regime or at least in a position to do hard political bargaining for the benefit of the people.

For now, Thein Sein regime seems to be gathering international support for its piecemeal reform initiatives, like showing flexibility by allowing Aung San Suu Kyi to travel and giving public speech, holding workshop discussion on how to remedy the sorry state of economy and poverty reduction issues, inviting the exiled Burmese community to come home, without having to fear persecution, and its highly publicized peace initiative directed at the non-Burman ethnic armed groups.

U.S. special representative to Burma, Derek Mitchell, on Wednesday, before leaving the country, said at his press conference that the Burmese government in realising its reform process and reconciliation should show sincerity and determination. He said unconditional release of all political prisoners, substantial dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and all concerned politicians, and instead of waging war with the non-Burman ethnic nationalities, it should conduct peaceful negotiation with all of them, were conditions needed in reconciliation process. (Source: BBC –Burmese – 14 September 2011)

While the international applause for Naypyidaw's piecemeal reform initiatives might be heartening, the real national reconciliation would hinge on whether the reform process is all-inclusive or holistic that could address all the woes encompassing Burma.

And as such, signing ceasefire agreement with only UWSA and NDAA, while waging war on other ethnic armed groups wouldn't bring peace to the whole country. In the same vein, releasing Aung San Suu Kyi alone and keeping 2000 or more political prisoners will not help the democratisation process in a true sense.

Maybe it is high time now for Thein Sein government to do away with the thinking of using political prisoners as bargaining chips to lessen international pressure and the implementation of "divide and rule" stance to maintain its top dog position against the armed ethnic groups. Instead, it should look at the reconciliation big picture and start to release all political prisoners, call nation-wide ceasefire and conduct all-inclusive political dialogue with all stakeholders in the country.

The author is General Secretary of the exiled Shan Democratic Union.

THE BURMANET NEWS, September 8, 2011 Issue #4264, Thu, 08. Sep 2011, "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22038>, September 8, 2011

Nobel Laureates urge Clinton to support Burma Col

– Lalit K Jha

Washington — Five prominent women Nobel laureates urged US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday to support the establishment of a United Nations Commission of Inquiry (Col) into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

In an open letter, the five Nobel laureates—Mairead Maguire, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi and Wangari Maathai—called on Clinton to “publicly and unequivocally support” the establishment of a Col during the upcoming UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in September.

The letter also urged the US to work with “all relevant governments” to include language in a UNGA resolution calling on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to establish a Col into “possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious human rights abuses and report back to the General Assembly at its next session.”

There was no immediate reaction from the State Department, but it is understood that the Obama administration is working closely with its international partners in this regard in New York. So far, as many as 16 countries have signed on in support of the Col, first recommended by UN rights envoy to Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana last year.

“Your favorable vote—and leadership in gaining support—is needed to reach majority,” the Nobel laureates said, adding that they hoped Clinton would take a stand that could put Burma’s rulers on the long road to accountability and demonstrate that crimes against humanity and war crimes are not tolerated.

“A resolution calling for a Commission of Inquiry would lend tremendous support to the people of Burma who have been toiling for so long for an end to the injustice in their country, and be a most powerful deterrent against such acts being repeated by others, elsewhere, time and again,” they said.

In their letter, they also noted that despite elections last year and promises by Naypyidaw to institute democratic reforms, the newly installed government continues to perpetrate mass human rights abuses.

“Women have been particularly affected, with the state breaking a ceasefire and launching military offensives in northern Shan and Kachin [states],” they wrote.

“The military regime commits serious crimes against the ethnic populations with complete impunity. Dozens of women have been raped since January 2011, and refugees noted that government soldiers declared they were ordered to do so, adding to previous evidence of sexual violence as a weapon of war within Burma,” they said.

Between news <burmaonlinecentre@gmail.com>, [NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK], Sun, **04. Sep** 2011 07:13:37

Between - Covering news about Burma, Myanmar - <<http://www.betweenonline.com/news-article/europe-urged-by-amnesty-to-back-myanmar-crimes-inquiry>>

Europe urged by Amnesty to back

Myanmar crimes inquiry

By **Between news**

September 4, 2011



Myanmar generals who control the country. @AP

Amnesty urged the European Union and its member states to extend their support to the creation of a UN commission of inquiry into crimes against humanity in Myanmar. This was informed Friday in an article for the online exile news magazine Irrawaddy.

Amnesty International had said earlier that Europe’s wait approach to the army-dominated government of Myanmar is irresponsible and urged EU to back an inquiry into crimes against humanity committed in the country.

Amnesty’s Myanmar researcher, Benjamin Zawacki, said that the Myanmar government has continued to violate human rights on a massive scale four years after the brutal suppression of a monk-led protest known as the Saffron

Revolution.

Zawacki said that reports from the ethnic minority areas place the number of 50,000 people as internally displaced by conflict while abuses have persisted under the new regime which rose to power after the controversial November elections.

After waiting for years, even decades and seeing enough, Zawacki said these violations call for accountability.

Zawacki further said that the hostilities between the military and armed ethnic rebels in the Kachin State in the north and Karen and Shan states near the Thai border in the east have been intensified or renewed since the election.

Prisoners being used as porters, human shields and minesweepers, of rape and other forms of sexual violence have been accounted and noted and the number of displaced people is surmised to be 30,000 in the Shan State and 20,000 in the Kachin State as of the end of July.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, will present a report to the UN in October. An EU-led resolution on Myanmar is likely to follow, Zawacki said.

"Burma_News" <burma_news@verizon.net>, Burma News - 12 September 2011, Tue, 13. Sep 2011 03:14:31

VOA . September 12, 2011 - <<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/US-Envoy-Offers-Burma-Road-Map-for-Lifting-Sanctions-129646318.html>>

US Envoy Offers Burma Road Map for Lifting Sanctions



Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, left, sees off Derek Mitchell, right, Washington's special representative to Burma, after their meeting at her home in Rangoon, September 12, 2011.

The U.S. special envoy to Burma says he has held discussions with the new government in Naypyitaw about conditions under which American sanctions could be lifted.

VOA interview with Derek Mitchell

Derek Mitchell, who arrived in the Burmese capital late last week, did not elaborate on what he told the Burmese leaders they will have to do. But he told VOA's Burmese service there have been encouraging gestures and the United States will be watching to see how Burma responds.

"There are conditions under which sanctions would be lifted. And, [I've] had that conversation in Naypyitaw," explained Mitchell. "So, we'll see how things develop here. There've been encouraging signs, you know, gestures and things that have happened here. And, we're just watching to see how it develops and we'll see how that goes and respond accordingly in Washington."

One such sign of change in Burma is the government's decision to let a reporter from VOA's Burmese service into the country. Reporter Khin Soe Win, who spoke to Mitchell in Rangoon, is the first staff journalist from the service to be admitted to Burma in almost 16 years.

Mitchell is on his first visit to Burma since being confirmed to the post by the U.S. Senate last month. State Department officials said he met in the capital Friday with the ministers of foreign affairs, labor, social welfare, information and border affairs. He is in Rangoon for talks with pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others.

Mitchell told VOA his talks have been very productive so far, but it is too early to say whether the Obama administration's policy of engagement with Burma is producing results.

"Well, I think it's too soon for me to be commenting yet. I've been on the job for two weeks," noted Mitchell. "This has

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been a very productive trip so far but I'm only in really the second, third day. And, I'm here to learn and to listen and to engage and have very frank conversations and to see places like this, which are remarkable evidence of the vitality and the commitment of the people of this country. So, we'll see."

Burma's current government took office at the end of March, replacing a long-ruling military junta. Since then it has opened a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, permitted visits by international human rights monitors and held so-far unsuccessful peace talks with ethnic rebels in the north, meeting key demands of the international community.

But the new government is dominated by former military officers allied with the old regime and continues to hold more than 2,000 political prisoners.

THE BURMANET NEWS - September 3 – 6, 2011 Issue #4263, Tue, 06. Sep 2011, "Editor" <editor@burmanet.org>, www.burmanet.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22022>

Exiled journalist detained after returning to Rangoon -

Wai Moe -

September 6, 2011



Thein Sein giving address on August 17, 2011 in which he offered exiles to return home. (Photo: The New Light of Myanmar)

Sein Kyaw Hlaing, a veteran Burmese journalist working in exile for the BBC Burmese Service (BBC Burmese) and Radio Free Asia (RFA), was reportedly detained and interrogated in Rangoon after accepting President Thein Sein's offer to exiles to return home.

Sein Kyaw Hlaing, who became well-known by Burmese audiences while working as a broadcaster for the BBC Burmese in the 1990s, was reportedly detained by Burmese secret service officers shortly after he arrived at the Rangoon International Airport in late August, one of his friends told The Irrawaddy on Tuesday.

"I heard he [Sein Kyaw Hlaing] negotiated his return home with Burmese officials in Mae Sot after Thein Sein made his comments about exiles," she said. "He was reportedly detained shortly after he landed at the Rangoon airport. He is now believed to be at the Aung Tha Pyay interrogation center of the Special Branch."

It has not been disclosed whether Sein Kyaw Hlaing would be charged or just detained for interrogation.

On August 17, Thein Sein told Burmese businessmen and civic group officials: "We will conduct a review to make sure that Myanmar [Burmese] citizens living abroad can return home if they have not committed any crime." However, the president did not clarify what the regime's definition of a "crime" was.

An official of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that although President Thein Sein invited exiles to return home, old laws still remain and the ability of

exiles to go home without fear still yet unknown.

While he worked with BBC, Sein Kyaw Hlaing was notable for his business reporting. With the Washington-based RFA, he covered the affairs of the ruling generals and ministers. One minister he reported on was Aung Thaung, a leader of the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party and former minister of Industry-1.

After working with the RFA, Sein Kyaw Hlaing became the editor of the New Era Journal based in Thailand. Currently, he is an outside contributor for RFA.

The Irrawaddy, Newsletter for September 9, 2011, Fri, 09. Sep 2011 17:44:49, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - EDITORIAL, Friday, September 9, 2011 - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=22044>

A Human Rights Whitewash?

In its latest effort to bolster its reformist credentials, Burma's new "civilian" government announced earlier this week that it had created a human rights commission charged with promoting and safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens in accordance with the 2008 Constitution.

Controversially, the new 15-member body, called the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC), will be headed by retired ambassadors Win Mra and Kyaw Tint Swe, who in the past have denied well-documented rights abuses by the former military junta at international fora.

Even worse, say critics of the government, the move comes as Burma's new rulers refuse to acknowledge the more than 2,000 political prisoners still languishing in the country's gulag, much less release them as demanded by the democratic opposition and international community.

It is also doubtful that the MNHRC will tackle another major issue that has long earned Burma a reputation as one of the world's worst abusers of human rights: crimes committed by its military against ethnic civilians as part of its anti-insurgent offensives.

With the recent resurgence of conflict in Shan, Kachin and Karen states, rights violations appear to be increasing, not decreasing, under the government of President Thein Sein. Evidence smuggled out of the country by clandestine local human rights groups show a disturbing pattern of rape, forced labor and other crimes committed by Burmese military personnel acting with complete impunity.

It can only be hoped, then, that the MNHRC will not merely serve as a means of whitewashing Burma's appalling rights record. Above all, the international community must not be taken in by the government's thus far cosmetic efforts to clean up its act.

Thankfully, Burmese opposition groups and exiles are not the only ones who remain skeptical about recent "reforms" under the new administration. In a statement released by the UN office in Rangoon on Aug 5, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he welcomed the army-backed government's pledges of reform, but added that the detention of political prisoners undermines confidence in the regime.

Ban, who said the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi last year gave the country a chance to "embark on the path of progress," urged "timely implementation" of proposed reforms, but stressed that the country continued to suffer from "serious, deep-seated and long-standing" human rights, political and economic problems.

If the MNHRC is to be anything more than a laughingstock, its leaders will have to come to terms with the facts and admit that after nearly fifty years of military rule, the state is the chief (albeit not sole) perpetrator of assaults on the human rights of Burmese citizens.

Until the members of the supposedly independent body can find the courage to confront the truth, it is essential that Western and regional governments continue to demand accountability from Naypyidaw. And the best way to do this is by supporting the opposition's calls for a UN Commission of Inquiry into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, NLDmembersnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSKJ News & Articles on Burma, Thu, 08. Sep 2011

aljazeera.net - <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2011/09/20119885754421184.html?>>

Myanmar weighs change in exchange rate

- Last Modified: 08 Sep 2011 09:20

Plan prompted by rise in kyat's value against the US dollar, which is threatening exports and hitting farmers. The government of Myanmar is planning to change the country's official exchange rate for the first time in almost four decades.

The country's currency, the kyat, is soaring in value against the US dollar, threatening exports.

Economists believe that huge inflows of foreign cash for infrastructure projects, high oil and gas prices, and a mass sell-off of government assets are combining to drive the kyat up.

Farmers, who constitute almost 70 per cent of the country's economy, are being hit very hard.

Al Jazeera's special correspondent reports from Yangon. Because of Myanmar's restrictions on media, we are not naming her. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2011/09/20119885754421184.html>?

The Irrawaddy, Newsletter for September 2, 2011, Fri, 02. Sep 2011 17:59:17, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - <http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22010>

'Save The Irrawaddy' Campaign Gains Momentum

By THE IRRAWADDY

Friday, September 2, 2011

A petition signed by nearly 1,600 influential Burmese persons, including politicians, journalists, writers, artists and film directors, has been sent to President Thein Sein on Thursday with a campaign message titled "6From Those who Wish the Irrawaddy to Flow Forever."



Construction at the Myitsone Dam, a megadam project on the Irrawaddy River. (PHOTO: Jingpaw Targyi)

The signatories included: Win Tin, a prominent member of the opposition National League for Democracy; veteran journalists Sein Win and Maung Wun Tha; Kyaw Thu, the founder of the Free Funeral Services Society; writer Than Myint Aung; social activist Aung Thin; the acclaimed writer Zaw Zaw Aung; and film director Cho Tu Zal.

The campaign was organized by Myat Thu, a prominent member of the 88 Generation Students group.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Thursday, Myat Thu said, "Along with the petition we sent a letter that outlined our anxieties."

The Irrawaddy River is considered the main artery of Burma and millions of people depend on it for their livelihoods. It has its source in Kachin State in northern Burma at the confluence of the N'mai and Mali rivers, and flows 2,170 km (1,348 mi) through many of the country's main cities, including Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mandalay, Sagaing, Bagan, Magwe and Pyay, before emptying in the fertile Irrawaddy delta.

But today the river is faced with an unprecedented threat in the form of ongoing dam projects in Kachin State.

Burma's previous ruling military regime and China's state-owned Chinese Power Investment Corporation (CPI) agreed to build a megadam at Myitsone, the confluence that acts as the source of the Irrawaddy. If completed, the hydropower dam project will be the 15th largest hydroelectric power station in the world, and will cost an estimated US \$3.6 billion.

The length of the dam is to be about 499 ft (152 m), and its height about 499 ft, equivalent to a 50-story building. The surface area of the reservoir is to be 295.8 sq mi (766 sq km), larger than the city state of Singapore.

Environmentalists, activists and politicians have given voice to growing concerns about the fate of this mighty river, but the government is reluctant to take action to stop construction.

Meanwhile, political parties and independent candidates have called on the Supreme Court to take action to save the Irrawaddy River.

“We send an open letter today,” said Win Cho, an independent candidate. “We are calling for an official response into the issue of the Irrawaddy River and the Myitsone dam project.”

Win Cho said other signatories included: Bauk Ja from the National Democratic Force; Soe Kyi from Thanlyin Township; Aung Myo Oo from Kyeemyindaing Township; and Min Aung from Botahtaung Township, all in Kachin State.

The Irrawaddy Newsletter for September 12, 2011, Mon, 12. Sep 2011 17:09:46, news@irrawaddy.org, www.irrawaddy.org

The Irrawaddy - Monday, **September 12**, 2011, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/opinion_story.php?art_id=22053>

COMMENTARY - By **NEHGINPAO KIPGEN**

US Envoy Should Prioritize National Reconciliation

Derek Mitchell, the United States envoy for Burma, is making his maiden official trip to Burma this week. It took nearly four months from his nomination in April to the confirmation in August for his new job. He is the second nominee to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

In November 2008, the outgoing President George W. Bush nominated Michael J. Green for the job which was never confirmed. The post was created as part of the Block Burmese Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts (JADE) Act of 2008.

With his experience regarding Asia, including his most recent job as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific affairs, Mitchell is someone who knows about the region, even if not specifically about Burma.

The creation of a special representative post, equivalent to ambassador rank, itself is a significant policy shift by the US government. Under the Bush administration, Burma was isolated and labeled as an “outpost of tyranny.” Since the failed democracy uprising in 1988, the US has not established an ambassadorial level engagement with Burma.

On the eve of his visit beginning Sept. 8, the US State Department announced that Mitchell’s trip is “intended to build upon US dialogue and engagement toward shared goals of genuine reform, reconciliation and development for the Burmese people.”

The visiting envoy is expected to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including leaders from the government and the opposition groups. In his attempts to help facilitate national reconciliation, what should be the envoy’s priority? Should the focus be on domestic actors or the international community?

He is expected to do both simultaneously. A visit to Bangkok and Jakarta is included in his itinerary. Thailand and Indonesia are two influential members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), in which Burma is a member. Since Burma is seeking to chair Asean in 2014, these two countries have certain leverage to influence the Burmese leadership.

Although they play important roles, the cause of Burma’s problems is neither the 1988 student uprising nor the dismissal of the 1990 general election result. It has a deep-rooted history, which needs the attention of policy planners and strategic thinkers.

If you pose a question to Burma’s ethnic minorities today, a majority of them, if not all, will consider themselves as a separate nationality. Such claim may sound like a radical approach, but that is not surprising for those who understand the political landscape of Burma prior to independence from the British in 1948.

When the international community says Burmese, the general assumption is that it is inclusive of all the people of Burma. However, ethnic minorities do not always approve of this generalization. Before the country’s independence, the term Burmese would refer to the people of Burma proper (ethnic Burmans).

For instance, the Karens can argue that they are not Burmese and were forcibly made to be part of the Union of Burma at the Panglong Conference in 1947. Likewise, the Chins, the Kachins and the Shans can argue that they only signed the Panglong Agreement because leaders of the then Burma proper agreed to autonomy for each nationality under the Union of Burma.

Because the ethnic minorities feel deceived by ethnic Burmans after the departure of the British, coupled with the oppressive nature of successive Burmese governments, there is lack of mutual trust between the Burmans and the minorities.

The interpretation of national reconciliation may also differ among the different Burmese opposition groups. A majority of ethnic Burmans would find reconciliation acceptable if the 1990 general election result is somehow acknowledged, and there is a review of the 2008 Constitution.

However, to ethnic minorities, restoration of democracy is inadequate without federalism. For the past few decades, successive Burmese governments have mistakenly construed the definition of federalism as separatism or secessionism.

It must be clear to the Thein Sein government that federalism is not tantamount to disintegration of Burma. The government should broaden the margins of national reconciliation to all ethnic groups of the Union of Burma.

Reconciliation among the ethnic Burman themselves will be a good start. The recent mitigation of confrontation between the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy and Thein Sein's government is a positive development, although it is still premature to draw any conclusions.

If the Burmese government and the international community are serious about resolving the decades-old problems, they must address the concerns of ethnic minorities. To do this, the government must initiate a tripartite dialogue.

Such negotiation should involve leaders of ethnic minorities, the Suu Kyi led Burmese opposition and representatives of the Burmese government at the highest level.

Since the U.S. engagement is welcome by all parties, the visiting envoy should seize this opportunity to emphasize the need to begin a tripartite dialogue. For such meeting to be congenial and productive, ethnic minorities should be allowed to express their concerns freely without intimidation.

Since the military could not neutralize the ethnic insurgency over the past siDerek Mitchell, the United States envoy for Burma, is making his maiden official trip to Burma this week. It took nearly four months from his nomination in April to the confirmation in August for his new job. He is the second nominee to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

In November 2008, the outgoing President George W. Bush nominated Michael J. Green for the job which was never confirmed. The post was created as part of the Block Burmese Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts (JADE) Act of 2008.

With his experience regarding Asia, including his most recent job as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific affairs, Mitchell is someone who knows about the region, even if not specifically about Burma.

The creation of a special representative post, equivalent to ambassador rank, itself is a significant policy shift by the USx decades, it is time for the Burmese government to realize that military operations are not the solution to Burma's problems. Resorting to violence begets violence.

In his attempts to facilitate national reconciliation, the U.S. envoy must understand that a permanent solution to Burma's problems greatly depends on the level of reconciliation achieved between the Burmese government and ethnic minorities.

At the international level, the envoy should consider the possibility of holding a six-party talk, involving the US, the European Union, ASEAN, China, India, and Burma. Any breakthrough in such setting will be a great success to the U.S. engagement policy.

Nehginpao Kipgen is a researcher on the rise of political conflicts in modern Burma/Myanmar and general secretary of the U.S.-based Kuki International Forum (www.kukiforum.com).

zin linn <zinlinn@yahoo.com.au>, [NLDmembrsnSupportersofCRPPnNLDnDASSK] News & Articles on Burma, Wed, 21. Sep 2011
(Mainichi Japan) - September 21, 2011, <<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/international/news/20110921p2g00m0in104000c.html>>

Suu Kyi believes Myanmar president committed to reform

YANGON (Kyodo) -- Myanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi said Tuesday she expects to be able to work well with President Thein Sein as he seems "committed to reform," but the international community should not yet lift sanctions imposed on the military-dominated government.

"I am sufficiently confident that I will be able to work together with him," Suu Kyi, who was released last November from seven years of house arrest, told Kyodo News in an interview.

"I think the way is open for positive change," she said.

Her remarks came after she and Thein Sein met on Aug. 19 at the presidential office in the administrative capital Naypyitaw, in what marked the first contact between a top government leader and the Nobel peace laureate since 2002.

Suu Kyi declined to comment on her talks with the president except to say, "I believe he is committed to reform."

But she cautioned it is not only Thein Sein that she and the forces of democracy have to win over in the nominally civilian government that came to power after last year's general election, which was boycotted by Suu Kyi's National League for



Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, left, sees off Derek Mitchell, right, Washington's special representative to Myanmar, after their meeting at her home Monday, Sept. 12, 2011, in Yangon, Myanmar. (AP Photo/Khin Maung Win)

Democracy.

"So it's not just the president and myself," she said of the dialogue process.

"Everybody will have to work hard to win over everybody onto the positive side," she said. "We've got to win over people through persuasion and through explanation and through the establishment of understanding."

"I've always said I am a cautious optimist, so I remain cautiously optimistic."

Thein Sein, who was prime minister under the previous military government, took office as president on March 30 and has vowed to promote national reconciliation after years of suppression of pro-democracy forces.

Asked if she will have another meeting with Thein Sein, Suu Kyi said, "I hope so."

Hopefully, at another such meeting the two sides could "work out some kind of agreement and the time frame" regarding the political process, she said.

On international sanctions, Suu Kyi said she and her NLD "are still maintaining the same position" that sanctions should be lifted when the government meets the demands made by countries that imposed them, such as by releasing political prisoners and making progress toward genuine democratization.

"For sanctions to be removed, these demands should be met to an acceptable degree," she said.

Suu Kyi dismissed speculation in some quarters that the release of thousands of political prisoners could lead to unrest, saying such fears are "greatly exaggerated."

"The leaders among those political prisoners are responsible people and they will not create unrest for the sake of unrest," she said.

"As long as the country is going along the right path, there is need to fear unrest. People go out onto the streets only if they think that the situation is so bad and that there is no other choice for them."

Asked how she sees her role in Myanmar's future, she said, "It's for the people to decide what my role is going to be. If I'm going to decide what my role is, then I wouldn't be a democratic leader."

On the Japanese government's role in facilitating genuine democratization in Myanmar, Suu Kyi said, "I think the Japanese government should try to get close to the people of Burma rather than to the government of Burma."

"I have said repeatedly that it seems to be a policy of Japanese government to maintain good and close relations with whichever government is in power, rather than to maintain good and understanding relations with the people of the country, and in the long run that is what is going to matter."

(Mainichi Japan) September 21, 2011

Published by : Burma Buero e.V., P.O.Box 27 03 66, D-50509 Cologne Tel: + 49 (0) 221-9522450 Fax: + 49(0) 221-9522470

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