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Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, centre, with Mr. Li Fanrong, Vice Administrator, National Energy Administration (NEA) of China, second from left, Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, left, Energy Adviser to Bangladeshi Prime Minister, U Win Khaing, second from right, and U Kyaw Tin. **PHOTO: MNA**

State Counsellor receives energy officials from PRC, Bangladesh

STATE Counsellor and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received delegations led by Mr. Li Fanrong, Vice Administrator, National Energy Administration (NEA) of the People's Republic

of China, and Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Energy Adviser to the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, all of whom had attended the Trilateral Meeting for Electric Power Trading Initiative in-

volving Myanmar, China and Bangladesh yesterday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nay Pyi Taw.

U Win Khaing, Union Minister for Electricity and Energy, and U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister

for International Cooperation, also attended the meeting, during which they discussed matters on enhancing cooperation in the areas of electricity and energy among Myanmar, China and Bangladesh.—MNA ■

Union Minister briefs on Rakhine, peace, democracy at UN side event

A side event entitled "Understanding Myanmar: Efforts for Reconciliation and Peace", at which the peace process, the transition to democracy and the Rakhine issue were addressed, was held Thursday during the 37th Session of the Human Rights Council being held at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

The Myanmar delegation hosting the briefing was led by U Thaug Tun, Union Minister for the Office of the Union Government.

The Myanmar delegation included Dr. Aung Tun Thet, Chief Coordinator of UEHRD, Daw Pyone Kathy Naing, Member of Pyithu Hluttaw, U Je Yaw Wu, Member of Amyotha Hluttaw, U Nay Oke Tint and Daw Haymar Min Thu. More than 40 Permanent Representatives/Representatives from Permanent Missions and UN agencies in Geneva were present at the event. U Htin Lynn, Permanent Representative of Myanmar, made the introductory remarks.

The Union Minister briefed attendees on the changes, challenges and choices for Myanmar. Salient points of his statement were:

- Myanmar has undergone remarkable change and transformation in recent years.

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'BANK OF THE YEAR IN MYANMAR 2017'

Awarded by Financial Times (The Banker)

Trilateral ministerial meeting held for electric power trading initiative between Myanmar-China-Bangladesh

A trilateral ministerial meeting for electric power trading initiative among Myanmar-China-Bangladesh was held at Horizon Lake View Hotel, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar yesterday.

U Win Khaing, Union Minister for Electricity and Energy, Li Fanrong, Vice Administrator of

National Energy Administration of the People's Republic of China, Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury BB, Advisor to the Prime Minister, for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Affairs from Bangladesh, and other senior officials from the energy sector of the esteemed countries attended the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to enhance the trilateral and Myanmar-China bilateral cooperation on electric power trading by promoting the interconnection of the power grid and infrastructure development among these three countries. The meeting in plenary discussed the kick-starting of

the Myanmar-China-Bangladesh cross-border power trading and its implementation mechanism.

By initiating and collaborating in electric power trading with the three neighbouring countries, reciprocal benefits can be enjoyed not only in the improvement of energy security, sharing

of electricity resources, infrastructure development, capacity development of officials and job opportunity, but also strengthening of long-term friendships and fulfilling the basic requirements of electricity supply to support the economic development of each country. —MNA ■

Union Minister briefs on Rakhine, peace, democracy at UN side event

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The country has abandoned five decades of military rule and is striving to ensure that democracy takes firm root. We are now on a path of transition away from centuries-long legacies of colonial occupation, ethnic rivalries and military rule.

- Immediately after taking office, the government began revitalizing the peace process. In spite of the complexities involved, there has been significant progress. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed by eight ethnic armed groups in 2015. A new milestone in the direction of peace was made last month when two more ethnic armed groups came on board.

- With regard to rule of law, it is worth mentioning here that State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in addressing the conference on justice and rule of law on Wednesday, underscored the need for judicial and legal reforms.

- The complexity is compounded by the high expectations that the international community and the Myanmar people have for the Government.

- With regard to Rakhine, it is only natural that there will be critics and doubting Thomases. Scepticism may well be warranted. However, what we need is constructive criticism and not recriminations and the passing of judgment. We need to find a constructive way forward.

- Nothing must be done to derail the transition to democracy.

- In Rakhine, our efforts to bring peace and development were on track until August 2017, when violence was triggered by the attacks on security forces by terrorists. Regrettably, the attacks and the subsequent mass displacement of people changed the situation and negatively af-



(From left to right) Dr. Aung Tun Thet, Chief Coordinator of UEHRD, U Htin Lynn, Permanent Representative to UN, Union Minister U Thaung Tun and MP Daw Pyone Kathy Naing. PHOTO: MNA

ected the perception and attitude of the international community on the situation in Myanmar.

- The Government, recognizing the urgent need to find a lasting solution to the problem of Rakhine, has been working to promote peace, harmony, and development for all communities.

- The Government has initiated a number of programmes to find a sustainable solution to the issue of Rakhine. We are currently implementing the recommendations of the Annan Commission. A Ministerial-level implementation committee and an Advisory Board, made up of eminent personalities from home and abroad, have been set up to help us find lasting solutions. The State Counsellor herself is leading a public-private enterprise, the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD), to provide humanitarian assistance, carry out resettlement and rehabilitation and to develop Rakhine State.

- Allegations of widespread “atrocities”, “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide” have been made repeatedly. The Government and the leadership have

been accused of standing by in silence.

- The leaders of Myanmar, who have been struggling so long for freedom and human rights, will never condone any action that can be construed as ethnic cleansing or genocide. The Government will do everything to prevent it.

- We take the allegations of human rights violations seriously and will take action against offenders whenever there is clear evidence.

- Far from being indifferent to the situation, we care deeply for all people affected, including those who have fled to Bangladesh, due to recent incidents in Rakhine.

- Following the agreement reached between Myanmar and Bangladesh, we have made preparations for the repatriation of the displaced persons.

- Concerns have been expressed by the international community for the safety and security of the returnees. We have strengthened our border guard police capacity to ensure the safety of the returnees as well as all communities – Rakhine, Muslim, Daingnet, Mro, Thet, Maramagyi and Hindu. They are all victims of

violence and terrorism. Security needs to be ensured for all.

- Today, we are faced with terrorism, funded and inspired from abroad. This is a dangerous trend for all of us. We need to join hands to counter the growing threat posed to our region by terrorism.

- The complexities and challenges in Rakhine cannot be seen in isolation and through a narrow lens of human rights of one particular community alone.

- On our part, Myanmar is ready to continue to work with the international community.

- At the same time, we earnestly hope that the international community will pursue a more objective and balanced approach to help overcome the challenges in Rakhine.

- Without mutual understanding, mutual suspicion and hostility will prevail. The lives of those most affected will not improve. And the door will be open to even greater tragedy.

- I believe that the better choice before us is to recognize the reality of the situation on the ground and accommodate each other's concerns. We must work together to build trust and confidence in order to achieve lasting peace, stability and development in Rakhine.

Then, Dr. Aung Tun Thet, Chief Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State (UEHRD), appraised Myanmar's development strategies and agendas, which are in line with Sustainable Development Goals. He also briefed about the work of UEHRD (a public-private enterprise), in term of humanitarian assistance, resettlement and development in Rakhine State through ten task forces.

Daw Pyone Kathy Naing, a

member of the Pyithu Hluttaw, gave an explanation of her perspectives on Rakhine, providing humanitarian assistance in Rakhine, the promotion and protection of human rights, and concerns on the terrorist acts of ARSA based on her 30 years of experience in human rights. She stressed that no one is above the law and they will continue to fight for it. She urged the international community to extend understanding and cooperation to Myanmar. She warned that sanctions against Myanmar will affect mostly the ordinary people of Myanmar.

During the question-and-answer session, Permanent Representatives/Representatives of Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, the European Union and Australia raised questions related to the state of cooperation between Myanmar and the UNDP and UNHCR on humanitarian and development assistance in Rakhine State, the work and funding of UEHRD, cooperation with the World Bank, more access for humanitarian organizations, the repatriation process, the possibility of setting up a national independent investigation commission, actions against security personnel who committed human rights violations, freedom of movement and prevention of statelessness.

The Union Minister and the Chief Coordinator responded to all the questions.

After the side event, the Union Minister briefed the press on the situation in Rakhine State at the United Nations Office and conducted a telephone interview with BBC (Myanmar).

The 37th Session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations Office in Geneva began on 26 February and will continue until 23 March.— Myanmar News Agency ■

Nothing must be done to derail the transition to democracy

MYANMAR is going through a critical period of transition. The government is dealing with social, economic, rule-of-law and judicial challenges.

Rebuilding and reforming the rule of law and justice sector is a top priority for Myanmar. It is also vital for our efforts towards sustaining Peace and Development.

In Rakhine, the government's efforts to bring peace and development was on track until Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) extremist terrorists made a series of attacks in Maungdaw in August, 2017. Due to the attacks, situations on administration, the economy, transportation, and regional development affairs strayed from the right paths, displacing people to other regions. Concerning these changes, authorities have taken measures to restore the governmental machinery back to normal.

With regard to Rakhine, we need to find a constructive way forward to find a lasting solution to the issue of Rakhine.

The Myanmar government is giving priority for repatriation of the displaced people. Humanitarian aid has been provided to all affected communities.

We take the allegations of human rights violations seriously. Little is known on reports in the international media about the many people of Daing Net, Mro, the Mramagyi and Rakhine minority groups and Hindus who have had to flee their homes as a result of violence. They are all victims of violence and terrorism. Security needs to be ensured for all.

Today, we are facing terrorism, funded and inspired from abroad. This is a dangerous trend for all of us.

Instigations, threats and false hopes given by ARSA also play a role in the mass displacement of people. Terrorist attacks triggered a humanitarian crisis, but many conveniently failed to denounce the provocative attacks.

The Myanmar government is giving priority for repatriation of the displaced people. Humanitarian aid has been provided to all affected communities.

Meanwhile, the international community has expressed concerns for the safety and security of the returnees from Bangladesh.

Myanmar is ready to continue to work with the international community to counter terrorism and to improve the lives of those affected by the terrorists.

We earnestly hope that the international community will pursue a more objective and balanced approach to help overcome the challenges in Rakhine.

2018 Union Tax Law, a turning point to dramatic change for higher economic growth

By Ye Htut Naing

It is intriguing news that the 2018 Union Tax Bill will be submitted to the Union Parliament, because it is presumably the first step to boost the economic environment of the country.

The Union Government made the preparations and will submit it to the Union Parliament for the first phase. One of the interesting things is that the government is going to remove all forms of withholding taxes starting on 1 April, 2018. The government aims at improving the socio-economic standards of all citizens and it is regarded as a good sign towards moving forward to high economic growth.

According to the new bill, the union government is trying to improve the tax system to be more effective and ensure that taxes are efficiently and systematically collected. Therefore, action needs to be taken against tax avoidances in accordance with existing rules and regulations.

Fitting the current economic development

The 2018 Union Tax Bill was drafted in order to fit the current economic development while giving tax exemptions relief to taxpayers. Arrangements should be made not to become a burden for the taxpayers and it will come into effect for money and assets both in and outside the country, which were legally obtained. Both citizens and taxpayers in the country must pay 3 per cent tax for the first six months, and 5 per cent for the next six months. In the old Union Tax Law 2017, there was a clause that allowed paying tax for money that escaped assessment, but it was removed in the bill.

The 2018 Union Tax Law

According to the new 2018 Union Tax Law, taxpayers will have to pay only 3 per cent on the trading value within the first six months, from April to September, while those paying income tax in the second half have to pay 5 per cent. Earlier, an income tax of 15 to 30 per cent had to be paid on the trading value of property.

Buyers and sellers will have to pay only 7 to 9 per cent tax, including 3 or 5 per cent income tax, and 4 per cent stamp duty.

The reduction in tax is likely to persuade traders who evaded tax, by making transactions with general power and soft power of attorney, and some deal working on the previous contract term, to pay tax and make changes in ownership. Consequently, people are satisfied with the reduction in tax and because of the booming of real estate market.

Moreover, tax cuts will result in better real estate deals and a possible decrease in real estate prices. Real estate deals are likely to grow on account of a decrease in the income tax. However, the stock market, the automobile market, the gold export/import market and banking operations are also competitive investment options. As there are many markets that can catch the investor's eye, price manipulation will not be seen significantly in the real estate market.

Shaping stable economic development

In shaping the stable economic development of a country, sustainable provision of supports for the development of small businesses from the private sector is essential. Also, small productive industries and economic enterprises play an important role in increasing per capita income.

There are various kinds of economic spheres for Myanmar. It is essential to constantly monitor conditions of small businesses from the public economic sector and to encourage them at the same time. It is because a nation's economic development is directly proportional to the development of SMEs.

Fostering economic reforms

Compared to other ASEAN nations, Myanmar has low levels of tax yield with a ballooning budget deficit. It is high time for the country to foster economic reforms and increase the effectiveness of tax collection. The country's total tax revenues have made up less than 5 per cent of the gross domestic product. Moreover, the devel-



Taxation is an important issue for a country which loses a lot of tax revenue mainly due to privileged people, a monopolised economy and corruption.

opment of the country depends upon the private sector. The lawmakers and members of parliament should urge the government to encourage the businesses and all citizens to take pride in paying taxes as dutiful citizens. In fact, taxation reform is vital for scaling up the economic and social reforms of the country, thereby creating job employment opportunities for the citizens. In fact, tax collecting is not intended to get money for the government's expenditure, but to implement the objectives of the state.

Emergence of the acceleration effect

According to the reports released by Asian Development Bank, industry growth of the country continues to accelerate with higher investment, both public and private, in garments and other light manufacturing, while services are getting a boost from tourism and expansion in the nascent telecommunications industry.

Utilisation of taxation

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi stressed the importance of collecting tax in her

speech. Taxation is an important issue for a country which loses a lot of tax revenue mainly due to privileged people, a monopolised economy and corruption. As for the government, it is needed to fight against corruption and bribery issues as a first priority in order to have tax revenues from taxpayers in line with rules and regulations. In doing so, the government will have tax revenues which could be used effectively for the welfare and interest of the country.

Creating tax-paying culture

She said the government was striving to improve the tax system and passport applications. But changing practices and systems in a way that is fair to everyone was very challenging. "For establishment of a tax culture, a country needs to collect taxes. Even a rich country like Japan collects taxes from its citizens. If we don't collect taxes, how can the government function? We need to collect taxes to allow the government to function.

"First the government needs to educate the public. Some people don't even know how much tax they pay as some tax laws are very complicated. We need to change the system and should make strenuous efforts to enhance the transparency of the use of tax revenues. I guarantee that the government would use cash aid effectively and transparently," she said. Therefore it is of paramount importance to develop tax-paying culture among the citizens.

Crucial points of taxation

The next crucial point of taxation is that people are satisfied with the attempts made by revenue authorities to draft a new bill which is related to the formation of a body that solves taxation problems. The 2018 tax system should be agreeable to both government and taxpayers so that the government can make the tax collection system more effective while citizens must pay their taxes as dutiful citizens.

Translated by Win Ko Ko Aung

Women's empowerment is a public health imperative: WHO

IN the WHO South-East Asia Region and beyond, more than half the population – women – face what is often egregious discrimination. Discrimination in education and the opportunity to learn to read and write. Discrimination in access to nutrition and the chance to grow healthy and strong. And discrimination in the workplace, where women can be subjected to unwanted advances or have their work undervalued or unpaid.

Gender-based discrimination in these and countless other forms is a persistent problem across the South-East Asia Region and throughout women's lives. But as much as gender-based prejudice and inequality violates human rights, stymies social and economic development, and crushes the hopes and dreams of millions of young girls and women, it also has a grave impact on public health and wellbeing.

Examples abound.

The region-wide practice of early marriage and pregnancy, for instance, is a direct threat to the health of young women and their children, especially in rural areas. Around six million girls aged 15-19 years give birth in our region every year, while in four of the region's countries, the adolescent birth rate is more than 50 per 1000 women aged 15-19 years. This provides immense dangers to the health of young women – dangers that can be avoided via rapid social empowerment (including access to contraception) and the implementation of laws against early marriage.

Gender-based inequities likewise impede women's access to essential health services, causing a range of adverse outcomes. Start with childbirth: Many deliveries still occur in the home, often in the presence of a birth attendant who is unskilled. This occurs partly as a result of women's inadequate access to health-related knowledge and a lack of decision-making power, and partly due to ongoing service gaps. Though during the Millennium Development Goal era the region made world-beating progress in reducing maternal and child mortality, further gains are needed to bring the maternal mortality rate to below 70 per 100 000 births, as per the Sustainable Development Goal target.

Still, there is room for optimism: The region-wide struggle to end gender-based discrimination and advance women's empowerment – particularly for rural women and girls – has never been stronger. WHO South-East Asia is proud to champion this cause, reflecting as it does our core values and commitment to human rights, as well as our evidence-based conviction that empowered women create healthier, happier communities that produce transformative change, both locally and globally.

Until full equality is achieved, however, WHO will continue to work with our member countries to promote and support the health of women and girls. That means continuing to train skilled birth attendants able to provide life-saving services when childbirth becomes complicated. It means continuing to advocate for increased access to contraceptives and the provision of adolescent sexual and reproductive health services. And it means continuing to actively campaign against gender-based violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation that can cause life-threatening injuries to young girls and adolescents.

Let us acknowledge that gender-based discrimination exists and is a daily occurrence in each of the South-East Asia Region's countries. Let us understand that it needn't be this way, and that gender equality can be rapidly achieved with sincere, society-wide resolve.

And let us take full stock of the fact that women's empowerment is more than a tool to advance social or economic ends – that it is a public health imperative, and one that demands our most strident pursuit.