

President U Thein Sein calls for cutting “red tape”

New Light of Myanmar – 27 December 2012

Nay Pyi Taw, 26 December - President U Thein Sein delivered an address on reforms to improve the management and administrative capacity of the government at the Credentials Hall of the Presidential Palace, here, at 9:00 am today.

Also present on the occasion were Union Ministers, Attorney-General of the Union, Auditor- General of the Union, Chairman of the Union Civil Services Board, Region/ State Chief Ministers, deputy ministers, deputy attorney-general, deputy auditor-general, members of UCSB, Chairmen of Self-Administered division/ zones and departmental heads.

At the ceremony, President U Thein Sein delivered a speech on reforms to improve the management and administrative capacity of the government. The full text of the speech follows.

It has been one year and nine months since our government took over managing the affairs of the country. During this transition period, we have undertaken democratic reforms by establishing a new administrative system both at the Union and the state/regional levels, by revising older laws that are not in line with reform processes, and by promulgating new laws.

This institution-building process is a work in progress. Numerous consultations, seminars and workshops are on-going across all sectors as we search for new modalities and paradigms for democratic state-building. Furthermore, reforms to some laws, rules and regulations are being honed to better accommodate both local conditions and modern needs.

In spite of both our government's and society's inexperience in promulgating such significant political reforms, as well as the range of time pressures and sectoral challenges that our entire country faces, the transition process in Myanmar has been remarkably smooth. This is largely because of the positive contributions of the Hluttaw, various government agencies, the judiciary, the Tatmadaw, the citizenry and many supportive organizations from inside and outside the country, to the reform process. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all these stakeholders.

In the process of transitioning from one form of governance to another, Myanmar's previous government, following the wishes of the people, entrusted our new government with the duty to undertake democratic and market-oriented economic reforms. In the first stage of the reform process, our new government has undertaken several major political reforms within the mandate of the 2008 Constitution. Because the country will not be able to enjoy peace and development without national reconciliation, many political organizations and ethnic armed groups have set aside their differences with the government and began to work with us in the areas where we share common interests. In fact, such cooperation has made all the achievements we have had so far possible.

However, we still have a lot of work to be done. In order to successfully complete all the remaining work, the government will take whatever actions are necessary, in consultation and cooperation with all stakeholders. In so doing, I would like to request our ethnic brothers and sisters and the rest of the populace to work hand-in-hand with the government in undertaking all the necessary reforms in the country.

While undertaking political reforms, the government has adopted broadly socially-oriented economic reforms that are designed to ensure secure livelihoods and create job opportunities for the citizens, to

improve the living standards, and social and economic status of the general public. Myanmar has lagged far behind its neighbouring countries both socially and economically.

The scale of the challenges that remain are immense. The government will have to systematically formulate short-term and long-term economic policies in order to ensure that the reforms will truly benefit the country and the general public. Therefore, the National Economic and Social Advisory Council has drafted the framework for economic and social reforms, which will be approved in this meeting of the national planning commission.

While the proposed framework for economic and social reforms was being drafted, line ministries and state/region governments openly sought advice and recommendations for economic reform plans and regional development by holding frank discussions in workshops with Hluttaw members, scholars and experts.

While holding these consultations, government leaders have revised several by-laws and regulations in light of the changes that have taken place in the country.

In undertaking the reforms, instead of a strictly linear approach of getting each task done one after another, we employ a multifocal approach. Along the way, we, in recognition of the livelihood needs of the people, have repeatedly given priority to issuing licenses to businesses that can create jobs for ordinary citizens.

In the last year or so, we have undertaken monetary and exchange rate reforms in order to ensure greater macro-economic stability and relaxed restrictions on foreign investments.

As part of the attempt to create more jobs for the general public, the government has formulated plans to develop special economic zones and industrial zones as well as a systematic rural development plan. However, the global economic downturn, the decline in overall global purchasing power, the lingering impact of western economic sanctions and the natural disasters caused by global climate change have invariably slowed down Myanmar's economic growth. The entire country will have to work together in order to improve the economic performance of the country significantly.

A national development plan cannot automatically bring wealth to the people. Only when the plans are properly and effectively implemented, will our nation see real economic growth and development. In order for the government to implement reform plans effectively, it must have necessary management capability and expertise.

In general, the capacity of the government will play an important role in deciding the success and failure of economic reforms in the country. In addition, systemic reforms would not be very effective, if the implements are reluctant to give up the values and practices of the previous regime and adopt new political, economic, social, and administrative values that are in line with democratic principles.

With all this in mind, both the government that is made up of the representatives elected by the citizens and the civil servants who draw salaries from tax revenue and serve the public, must strive with determination to create the conditions to foster good governance and an efficient government. In addition, all political, economic, social and administrative reforms undertaken by the government must aim at achieving grassroots-based development.

However, in townships and wards across the country, many citizens are having many problems in dealing with local government officials. Local government officials in some areas run their offices:

- Without paying attention to public opinion or without consulting with the general public,

- Without transparency or without informing the public of the plans that are about to be implemented,
- Without paying attention to public inquiries or without thinking about how they might better meet the needs of the public,
- Without following the rules and regulations adopted by the line ministries or regional governments,
- By accepting bribes that are made possible by corruption
- As deliberately ineffective institutions that make it difficult for the public to interact with the government, and
- Without necessary management capacity and skills.

On the whole, it is quite clear that the elements of good governance and clean government are absent in many local administrative bodies. As a result, local state officials have come to lack the capacity to meet the needs of the local people and to solve the problems that they are facing. In some areas, the public has come to loathe dealing with ward level administrative officials. We must therefore undertake administrative reforms from the ward/village level to the union level. Only then will good governance and clean government prevail in our country.

The government will therefore implement the reforms that are designed to improve the management and administrative performance of government agencies in the third stage of the overall national reform strategy.

The administrative reforms that should be in line with the people-based development strategy should transform government officials into public servants who truly serve the public. In order for this to happen, officials from ward/village level to the union level must change their mind-set, old behaviour, and the way they used to performed in ways that will make the government more transparent, accountable, clean and effective. I also want to call on officials ranging from village administrators to union ministers to try to be good leaders whom the people can rely on. While undertaking political and democratic reforms, we must wholeheartedly try to improve the capacity and performance of both individual public servants and the entire bureaucracy as a whole.

Under a system in which good governance prevails, the government and the people will not have much difficulty cooperating with each other. As I have repeatedly noted, we need public cooperation in order to be able to implement democratic reforms and development plans successfully. We must therefore undertake the administrative reforms in ways that will attract public participation in the reform process. Under the new administrative system, the township administrative officer will form a township administrative committee and sub-committees with township level officials from other government agencies, community leaders, and representatives from civil society, business and professional associations to manage law and order, security, the rule of law, and economic and social issues in the township. The township committee will collectively discuss and make decisions on all the matters that used to be handled by few township officers.

The committee will then collectively implement the decisions. Similar administrative reforms will be undertaken at the district level as well. At the ward and village level also, village or ward level committees with the village or ward level administrator and community leaders will perform similar functions. I believe that such an arrangement will reduce public grievances caused by the highhanded actions taken by individual administrators. I therefore would like to instruct state and region governments to form committees at various levels properly and in conformity with the law.

Because municipal work is very important in improving the livelihood and living standard of the people and in developing townships and villages, it should not be handled only by a small group of officials. The Municipal Act that was enacted according to the 1898 Myanmar Nainggyan Act No.3 was in force until 1993 and elected public representatives were involved in Municipal committees and their activities. I would like to instruct responsible officials to start studying what kind of laws, rules and regulations might need to be adopted in order to elect public representatives for Municipal Committees and to specify the roles public representative should play in running township municipalities.

Union Ministers must also relax legal and procedural restrictions to cut the bureaucratic red tape in their respective ministries. In addition, all ministries must try to cut any budget deficit in their ministries. We will need to promulgate new laws and by-laws that will require state-owned enterprises to turn themselves into truly profit-oriented enterprises by forming boards and corporations.

We will also try to overcome the weak cooperation and coordination between different ministries by forming cabinet committees. This will allow the cabinet to adopt policies and plans in a proper and coordinated manner.

In order to deal with the weak coordination between Union Ministries and state and regional governments, we will need to define the division of power and responsibilities between the central and local governments more clearly by promulgating a new by-law. A similar measure will be undertaken to define the power and responsibilities for self-administered zones/division and district and township level administrative bodies.

Union Ministries will take the responsibility of managing the activities of the ministries in accordance with relevant laws, by-laws and regulations. The state and regional government supervise the activities of various government agencies in their respective areas and deal with the issues related to security, the rule of law, the prevalence of law and order and improving the social and economic well-being of the residents of their respective state or region.

Section 256 of the Constitution has entrusted the state and regional governments with the power to supervise, inspect and coordinate the activities of civil servants in their respective state or region in accordance with the law. Accordingly, I would like to instruct all state and regional governments to perform this entrusted duty according to the law.

The reforms that are designed to improve the administrative and management systems of a government could also contribute significantly to the successful completion of the political reforms and the dissemination of democratic values and practices in the society. I therefore would like to encourage all government employees to perform their assigned duties wholeheartedly and with goodwill. From now onwards, if individual citizens, the government, and political parties do everything they can in the roles they are assigned to, the country will definitely be able to overcome all the challenges and difficulties it is now facing. We will then be able to hope for a new peaceful and harmonious Myanmar.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that governance in Myanmar falls short of international good governance standards. Of all the measures we need to undertake to create good governance, I would like to ask you all to eradicate bribery and corruption in the country. In bribery cases, both givers and takers are responsible for it. If the government is tainted with bribery, it will seriously damage the image of the country and its national and international prestige.

Therefore, I would like to request the general public to actively participate in the anti-bribery and anticorruption campaigns. It is time for public servants who receive a portion of tax revenues as salary

to prove that they are good citizens and nationalists who wish to enhance the prestige of both the country and all ethnic nationalities, by keeping themselves and their government departments clean from corruption. I will conclude by requesting all of you to work together with discipline and goodwill in order to improve the efficiency of the government and to foster good governance and help build clean government in the country.

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