

There is a growing disparity between the words of Thein Sein, and the actions of his government. However, the policy of Britain, the EU, USA and many other countries appears to be based on his promises, not actual policy and action. Promises and pledges by Thein Sein are frequently cited as one of the justifications for ending international pressure normalising relations.

Thein Sein is normally very careful in what he says. Western educated advisors help him in particular with scripts for delivering messages to the international community.

There also appears to be a pattern of tailoring certain messages in English for international consumption, and other messages in Burmese for domestic consumption.

Given the strong emphasis on focussing on the positive things Thein Sein says, regardless of whether he acts on them, and in order to provide some balance, here are some quotes from Thein Sein, past and present, which are a little more revealing.

On past abuses

Dictatorship was a 'good policy', 'for the good of the people':

Journalist: Are you now regretting what happened during the years of the dictatorship?

"From our point of view we have acted for the benefit of the people. The opposition might think that we have done wrong but we think it was for the good of the people.

So it was a good policy. Nobody can say who was right or who was wrong."

Journalist: But is what is for the good of the people you have sent people to prison for their opinions?

"All countries of the world are doing the same thing to guarantee stability of the country and to avoid disorder or riot. This policy was not intended to hurt anyone it was to ensure the stability of public order."

Interview French television February 2013 (http://oeil-sur-la-planete.france2.fr/?page=emissions&id_rubrique=109)

The massacre of students in 1988 and crushing the uprising saves the country

"The Tatmadaw with a strong sense of duty and loyalty saved the country several times whenever the country was close to collapse and loss of independence and sovereignty.

Also in 1988, the Tatmadaw government saved the country from deteriorating conditions in various sectors and reconstructed the country."

Speech to Parliament 30th March 2011.

We need economic growth because if become richer they won't struggle for freedom, and because it is important for our status.

"Regarding the economic might, we have to try for economic growth. If our country is not economically strong it will face underestimation and unfair treatment from other countries.

National economy is associated with political

.....

affairs. If the nation enjoys economic growth, the people will become affluent, and they will not be under influence of internal and external elements.”

Speech to Parliament 30th March 2011.

As dictators we did a great job

“The State Peace and Development Council has built political, economic and social foundations necessary for future democracy since 1988 to date.

So, we sincerely thank all the people all the Tatmadaw members and all service personnel for achieving peace, stability and the rule of law and building development infrastructures instrumental to a democratic nation.”

Speaking at Young Global Leader conference, Burma, June 2013

On ethnic conflict, where the Burmese Army has systematically committed war crimes and what are now classified as crimes against humanity, including by soldiers under his command, which are now called ‘misunderstandings’

“Since independence therefore there has been many armed groups because of misunderstandings and miscommunications because of the prior divide and rule policies.”

Speaking at Young Global Leader conference, Burma, June 2013

We have to strengthen military might

“Regarding military might, we have to relay the duty to strengthen the nation from one generation to another for perpetuation of independence and sovereignty ...

Therefore, our country needs a world-class Tatmadaw.”

Speaking at Young Global Leader conference, Burma, June 2013

On the discriminatory 1982 Citizenship law which deprives the Rohingya of citizenship and violates Burma’s international treaty obligations

“...from what I learnt, the law intends to protect the nation and some time was taken to draft it with input from experts ... I believe the law is meant to protect the country and the government has no plan to revise it.”

Interview with Democratic Voice of Burma, 1st March 2013

There are no Child Soldiers, despite Their Sein chairing a committee since 2004 to stop child soldier recruitment

In 2005:

“It is necessary for us to always refute the accusations [about the forcible recruitment of child soldiers] systematically ... [and] always project before the international community the correct efforts being made by the committee and refute baseless accusations.”

Concluding speech to the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children, 2005

In 2007:

“No forced recruitment is carried out and all the soldiers have joined the army of their own accord.”

Speaking as Chairman of the Committee for Prevention against Military Recruitment of Underage Children

There is no big problem with land confiscation

“Even today, there is no major problem of land-grabbing in the eastern part of the country.”

Interview with CNN, 20th May 2013

There are no political prisoners

“...no political prisoners - all prisoners have broken the law. We don’t accept their ‘conscience.’ They are now imprisoned because they have broken a law. There are many prisoners like them in the prisons.”

ASEAN Summit Bali November

2011: (Source, DPA: http://www.qatar-tribune.com/data/20111121/content.asp?section=pakistan1_2)

There are no Rohingya

“There are no Rohingya among the races. We only have Bengalis who were brought for farming [during British rule].”

19 May 2013, in an interview with the Washington Post

On the Constitution, which Thein Sein was in charge of drafting (The total process took 15 years and proposals by ethnic and other groups were rejected).

“Actually, we could have wrapped all of it up in a day, but there’s a need to make it look good, isn’t there?”

(Source, Reuters <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/15/us-myanmar-theinsein-idUSBRE8AE1RL20121115>)

Asking for international co-operation in expelling all Rohingya from Burma

“The solution to this problem is that they can be settled in refugee camps managed by UNHCR, and UNHCR provides for them. If there are countries that would accept them, they could be sent there.”

11 July 2012, while discussing the issue of Rohingya with UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres

Not giving a straight answer to a question

For a good example of how Thein Sein repeatedly uses bland platitudes to avoid giving a straight answer to a simple question, have a look at this article by Fred Hiatt at the Washington Post, who conducted a 45 minute interview with him in **May 2013**.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/05/20/troubling-signs-for-burmas-reforms/>

The Army will always have a role in government

The army has a proud history in Burma and *“will always have a special place”* in government, Burmese President Thein Sein said in an

interview Sunday with **The Washington Post on 19 May 2013**

“This is an armed forces that the country has had to rely on for a very long time for security and to meet external threats as well in the past. So it was important at this time that they were not left behind entirely. So in this constitution, they have a limited role.”

Financial Times Interview July 12th 2012

Why media censorship is still OK, shortly after banning TIME magazine in June 2013

“There may be different points of view expressed by sections of the public and national and international media. Indeed, you will be aware that I have worked to restore freedom of expression, accept plurality of opinions and reinvigorate civil society. However, like the Myanmar adage ‘no matter how true a statement, it should not be said if it will not be beneficial and constructive’, I strongly believe that the right of freedom of expression should be exercised in light of the prevailing delicate political dynamics and for a constructive purpose.”

Radio speech 7th July 2013

On North Korea

The Korea Central News Agency reported the North Korean Foreign Minister meeting Thein Sein in 2010 while he was prime Minister of the dictatorship:

“Thein Sein noted with high appreciation that the Korean people have made big strides in strengthening of the military capability and economic construction under the wise leadership of Kim Jong Il. The prime minister wished the Korean people greater successes in their drive to open the gate to a thriving nation in 2012 marking the centenary of birth of President Kim Il Sung. The government of Myanmar will continue to strive for strengthening and development of the friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries, he said.”

August 1st 2012

Drug lords are real friends

“I was in Mong Ton and Mong Hsat for two weeks. U Wei Xuegang and U Bao Youri from the Wa groups are real friends.”

Speaking on 9th May 2001 about two drugs lords indicted by a US court for their involvement in the golden triangle drug trade, which includes methamphetamines and heroin.

On the 2010 elections, which were universally condemned as not free and fair

“Elections in 2010 will be free, fair and inclusive.”

Meeting US Senator Webb, 14 August 2009

The UN lied when it said Thein Sein ordered human rights abuses

Christiane Amanpour:

“The Human Rights Special Rapporteur, back in 1998, said that when you were a military commander, of the eastern state, there were orders to confiscate about 13 plots of land and rice field, to increase the amount of land for the military, for the military base, what do you say about that?”

Thein Sein:

“I was serving as the commander of the eastern

command in 1996, but during my time serving as the commander, there was never a problem of confiscating land. I have never taken land against the will of the people. There was no major issue of land-grabbing in that area while I was serving as the commander. Some of the reports were fabricated. So I have to say there were no major problems.”

Interview with CNN, 20th May 2013

On Than Shwe

“The system has changed; we know – there was an understanding – that things could not go on the way they were, there was a need for this change to the system, to the framework. The legacy of General Than Shwe was to establish and move us towards this new system.”

Financial Times Interview July 12th 2012

“General Than Shwe is not involved in any way in current government affairs, but he is someone who has been my boss in the past, someone I respect.”

Financial Times Interview July 12th 2012

There are no hardliners

“...It is not the case that there are hardliners in the cabinet who are actively resisting or against changes or reforms...”

Financial Times Interview July 12th 2012

Human Rights Abuses Since Thein Sein Became President

Burma Campaign UK has also produced a briefing paper outlining the Human Rights abuses that have taken place since Thein Sein Became President.

You can view the briefing here:

www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/burma-briefing

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